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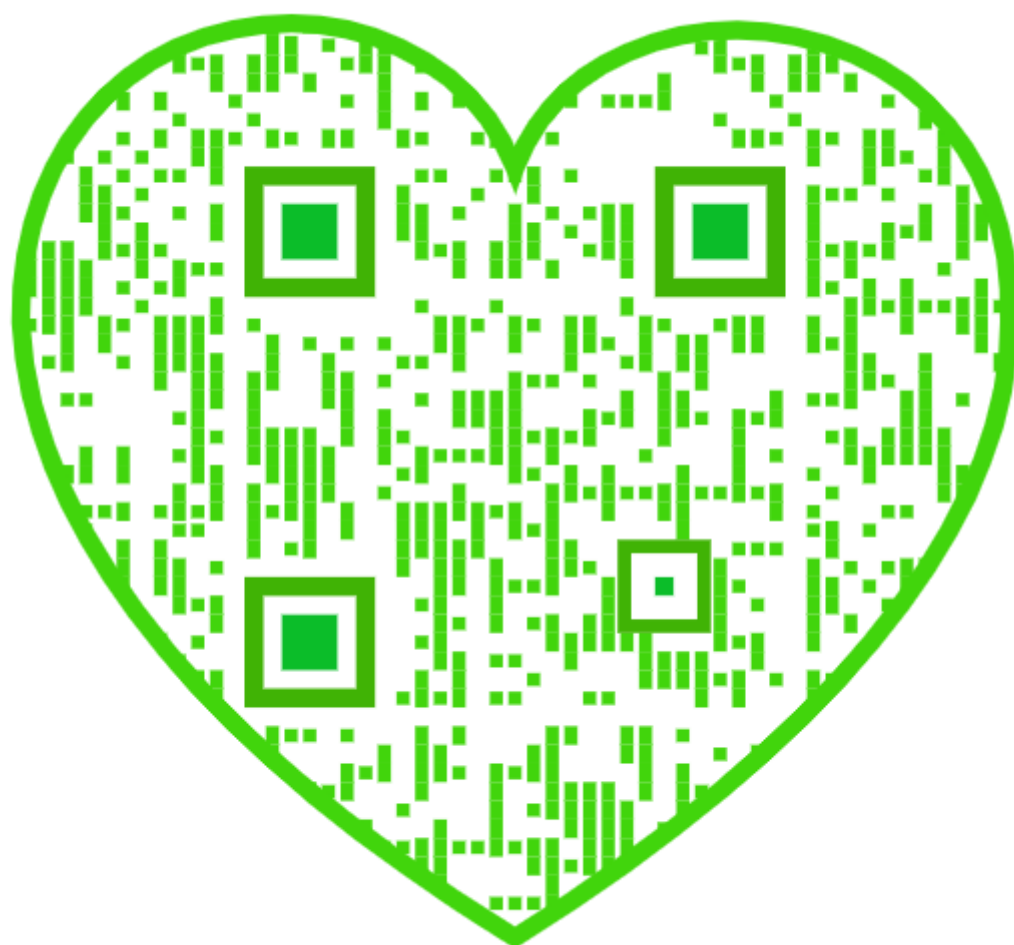
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COMMENT

THE BEST FUN EVs JUST KEEP GETTING BETTER



Eighteen months later, and look how far we've come. Our first group test of affordable, fun EVs in 2023 was won by the Cupra Born, which, although an admirable car, wasn't a true hot hatch. But it showed the rate of progress being made in this class – and that pace has only increased since. As proof, the Born, even in its latest performance-focused VZ guise, is no longer the winner (p38) and there are new contenders in the mix, including models from desirable brands such as Mini and Alfa Romeo.

The winner is a car that, thanks to its Renault 5 twin, has already received significant coverage. The starting point for that is undoubtedly its eye-catching looks but now it's clear there's far more to applaud the new Alpine A290 for.

Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised when Alpine's A110 is one of the best-engineered, most lauded sports cars of modern times, but the A290 hot hatch has a very different brief to fulfil.

Matt Saunders describes "the depth and integrity of the A290's performance engineering" as its predominant reason for shining and describes it as a car "fully worth the hype".

Nothing excites us more than the clever development of driver's cars in this challenging era. Alpine is the latest to prove it's possible and it inspires us to believe even more progress will be made across the industry over the next 18 months.

Rachel Burgess, magazine editor
rachel.burgess@haymarket.com

Meanwhile, online...

autocar.co.uk



MC20 GT2 Stradale driven
Maserati takes on the Porsche 911 GT3 with the track-weaponised, £274,000 MC20 GT2. Join Matt Prior on road and track.



Our greatest mid-air memories
Head over to our Instagram page for a round-up of our most outrageous zero-gravity moments.



Junkyard gems of Georgia
Join us for an expertly guided tour of one of America's largest car junkyards – the Old Car City of White, Georgia.



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20 FERRARI 12CILINDRI SPIDER: OUR VERDICT



AUTOCAR

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38 MOST FUN EVs FOR SENSIBLE MONEY

NEWS

GOT A STORY Email our news editor
will.rimell@haymarket.com



AUDI R8 PRIMED TO RETURN AS LAMBO-ENGINEED SUPER-PHEV

New supercar in line for 2027 launch with Temerario's twin-turbo V8

Audi is preparing a dramatic return for the R8 as a plug-in hybrid supercar that in its most extreme form could become the brand's most powerful and fastest road-going model to date, after a rethink about its transition into an all-electric era.

The new R8 is tentatively slated for a debut in late 2027. Development of the Mercedes-AMG GT and Porsche 911 rival has progressed beyond the feasibility stage, understands Autocar, and engineering is under way with the backing of Audi chairman Gernot Döllner. The new two-seater

will be twinned with the Lamborghini Temerario, reigniting Audi's supercar alliance with its Italian Volkswagen Group sibling. This partnership was forged in 2006 with the launch of the original R8

and its mechanical twin, the Gallardo – a move that allowed Audi to step up into the supercar ranks for the first time. The collaboration was renewed in 2015 for the second-generation R8 and Huracán. Across its first two

generations, from 2007 to 2023, a total of 44,418 R8s were sold globally.

A similar approach has been taken for the third-generation R8. The new Audi supercar is expected to use the drivetrain, key structural elements, electronics and chassis of the Temerario – the successor to the Huracán launched last year.

Audi will again differentiate the R8 from its Lamborghini sibling with a focus on everyday usability. Both coupé and cabriolet bodystyles are likely.

The resurrected Audi R8 will draw power from Lamborghini's twin-turbocharged 4.0-litre V8.

The flat-plane-crank unit produces 789bhp and 538lb ft of torque, boosted to 907bhp by a trio of axial-flux electric motors. These are powered by a rechargeable 3.8kWh lithium ion battery, which offers up to six miles of electric-only driving.

In the Temerario, two motors are mounted on the front axle to create a four-wheel-drive set-up. The third motor is positioned between the V8 and an eight-speed dual-clutch automatic gearbox to act as a starter-generator and recover energy under braking.

The return of the R8 in 2027 is set to coincide with



Temerario's chassis and tri-motor V8 PHEV set-up will underpin new R8

“The new R8 could become Audi’s most powerful and fastest road-going model to date”



COMETH THE HOUR, RETURNETH THE AUDI R8

MATT PRIOR



In short, why wouldn't they bring back the R8? Audi's global sales were down 12% in 2024, the TT has died, so too the R8, and less than 10% of Audi's sales last year were fully electric models. As for so many car makers, the ZEV transition is tough going. It feels like Audi could do with a halo model, and it feels like it could do with an engine.

Of course that's turbocharged and of course it's hybridised (a lot like the Mk2 Honda NSX; who knew that would be such a trailblazer?) but the new R8 will go hard and make noises.

I imagine that, unlike the first R8, which had its own engine, got much of its own chassis and was six inches taller and longer than the Gallardo, much more will be shared with the Temerario from the off this time.

Back then, the R8 felt like a car Audi wanted. This time, it feels like one it needs.

the launch of more powerful Temerario models. This means a possible successor to the R8 Performance could conceivably push the supercar's top-end output close to 1000bhp. With this power, it will target a 0-62mph time well below 3.0sec and a top speed close to the Temerario's official 210mph – potentially making it the most powerful and fastest road-going Audi to date. Currently, this is the 912bhp E-tron GT RS, with the EV able to dispatch 0-62mph in 3.3sec.

This new drivetrain marks a significant shift in philosophy for the R8, which has exclusively used naturally aspirated V8 and V10 power since its 2006 debut. However, the highly strung nature of Lamborghini's new V8 engine – which develops its peak power between 9000rpm and 9750rpm and has a 10,000rpm redline – will provide a similar response and sound to the powerplants of its predecessors.

The adoption of plug-

in hybrid technology will also allow the R8 to act as a showcase for Audi's electrification efforts, aligning with recent moves by Mercedes-AMG and Porsche with the GT and 911 respectively. As such, the R8 E-tron name is being considered.

The basis for the new Audi flagship is the same aluminium spaceframe structure used by the Temerario. A completely new development, it uses 50% fewer components than the earlier Huracán and second-generation R8, along with an 80% reduction in welds. It is also claimed to bring a 25% increase in stiffness over the older spaceframe.

As with its predecessors, the R8 will serve as a statement of design direction for the brand. The PB18 E-tron concept, unveiled in 2019, hinted at Audi's vision for an all-electric successor to its

flagship supercar. However, the brand's design team has undergone significant change since then, with former Ford, Kia and JLR designer Massimo Frascella replacing Marc Lichte as chief creative officer in 2024.

The decision to revive the R8 is reportedly down to an agreement reached between the Audi board and its Volkswagen Group parent on how the brand can transition to an all-electric line-up. It will now extend the model cycles of select ICE models and

expand the number of plug-in hybrids that it offers.

Autocar understands that another key factor is Audi's push to develop FIA-homologated iterations of the new R8 to once again spearhead the brand's involvement in key endurance events such as the Nürburgring 24 Hours.

Production of the third-generation R8 is expected to take place at Audi's Böllinger Höfe facility in Germany, the same site as its predecessors.

GREG KABLE



Second-gen R8 used an atmo V10 and was retired by Audi last year

WHEN THE ORIGINAL R8 TOOK ON THE 911

The hype around the original R8 at its late-2006 launch was huge. When we drove it at the start of 2007, we pitted it against the 911, of course. It was a battle for the ages. Read it here.



FERRARI SET TO REVAMP LINE-UP IN 2025 AS PART OF LUXURY PUSH

An EV, the F80 and hotter versions of the SF90, 296 and Roma are all due this year

Ferrari is readying high-performance variants of its best-sellers as part of a product offensive that will almost completely refresh its line-up in 2025.

Incoming are aggressive versions of the Roma, 296, and SF90 sports cars, which will arrive alongside the already revealed F80, a LaFerrari successor.

They will join the new V12-powered 12Cilindri and Purosangue SUV – the latter of which, as it currently stands, will be the sole

Ferrari not to receive a new variant in 2025.

The performance push comes as the Italian firm enters the final stages of the build-up to the launch of its long-awaited first EV, which will make its debut on 9 October at Ferrari's Capital Markets Day.

The onslaught of new models represents a change of strategy for Ferrari, which is not aiming to improve its sales volumes (typically slightly under 14,000 annually) but instead

diversify its product mix – selling a greater number of model lines but each in smaller numbers.

"We don't want to do a few models with a lot of volumes," said CEO Benedetto Vigna. "We believe this is a little bit against the desirability and is not compliant with our strategy to always become more and more a luxury brand."

Here's what we can expect from Ferrari in 2025. **CHARLIE MARTIN**



SPY SHOTS



New Roma coupé will get M tag, more power and evolutionary styling

ROMA TO RETURN

Production of the Roma coupé ended last year, but it's being revamped and revived for 2025.

Prototypes of its successor look remarkably similar in silhouette, suggesting it's less revolution and more evolution for the new model.

It's set to follow the Portofino convertible in

getting the Modificata (M) treatment, with revised styling, a more aggressive chassis set-up and an extra dose of power.

To that end, it's possible Ferrari will look to make up the shortfall to the more powerful Aston Martin Vantage and the Porsche 911 Turbo by taking it to around 650bhp.

It's expected to be



SPY SHOTS

revealed in the coming months and the first cars are likely to land in the UK before the end of the year. A Spider version will follow after that.

FIRST EV TO OFFER 'A LOT OF FUN'

It's hard to overstate the importance of Ferrari's first EV, which will do away with the critical element that has defined every one of the marque's road cars for 80 years: an engine.

Prototypes spotted so far have used old Maserati Levante bodies, which suggests that the new model could be a higher-riding proposition in the mould of the Purosangue, Ferrari's first SUV.

Indeed, electrification suits this configuration because the fitment of batteries under a vehicle's floor requires additional

ground clearance, raising it to an SUV-typical height.

Of course, Ferrari may not use the typical 'skateboard' design but instead centralise the mass around the front or rear axle. This would provide a distribution of weight to mirror that of its existing front- and mid-engined models.

Regardless, the brand's priority is for drivers to "have a lot of fun", CEO Benedetto Vigna said recently. "When we do electric cars, we will produce them in the right way," he added.



Ignore the styling: prototypes are using Maserati Levante bodies



Dubbed 296 Versione Speciale internally, it has new aero addenda

296 GETS HARDCORE FOCUS

The more aggressive version of the Ferrari 296 – a sports car that earned a five-star Autocar road test rating in standard guise – has much to live up to, following in the footsteps of the 488 Pista and the 458 Speciale.

It's expected to adopt broadly the same formula as those cars, with a smidge of extra power and notable weight reduction to improve its raw pace.

For reference, the 458 Speciale gained 35bhp and shed 90kg compared with the Italia on which it was based, improving its power-to-weight ratio by nearly 50bhp per tonne, or 13%.

A similar treatment would give the harder-hitting new 296 around 630bhp per tonne. That compares with the existing car's 557bhp per tonne and, coincidentally, almost

exactly matches the ratio of the now-discontinued SF90 Stradale.

Images of prototypes captured testing near Ferrari's Maranello base in Italy suggest the more hardcore 296 is also in line to receive a range of aerodynamic tweaks. These include a prominent duck-bill spoiler at the rear and what appears to be a more prominent front splitter.



SPY SHOTS

Mules are undergoing cold weather tests; car will be revealed on 9 Oct

SF90 IN LINE TO TOP 1000BHP

Ferrari's flagship SF90 supercar is also due to get the M treatment. The outgoing 986bhp SF90 had fallen slightly behind in the arms race for more power – with the new Lamborghini Revuelto outgunning it with 1001bhp – so Ferrari is expected to turn up the wick.

The SF90 M is most likely to use the modified version of the twin-turbo 4.0-litre V8 and plug-in hybrid set-up from the track-focused

SF90 XX, which puts out a bombastic 1016bhp. That would be sufficient to shade the Revuelto, which is the fastest-accelerating car to have featured in an Autocar road test.



Technical changes are also likely to focus on cutting out as much weight as possible. The SF90's 1570kg dry weight (1698kg as road tested) hampered its on-limit handling, especially compared with the lighter 296 GTB.

Focused revisions like these could be the key to unleashing the underlying potential that has been apparent in the SF90 since its debut.



It will look undeniably like a Ferrari, despite its elevated ride height



SPY SHOTS

SF90 M is likely to use the SF90 XX's powertrain and shed some weight

PEUGEOT BACKS RETURN OF GTi HOT HATCHES...



AUTOCAR
IMAGE

A Peugeot hot hatch revival is on the cards, new CEO Alain Favey has revealed.

In his first interview since taking over from Linda Jackson earlier this month, Favey said that bringing back the GTi badge was “a question I’ve been asking myself very much”.

It has yet to appear on the second-generation 208 supermini, launched in 2019, and has been dormant since the 308 GTi went off sale in 2021.

The Peugeot Sport Engineered (PSE) sub-brand, effectively a successor to GTi in the Peugeot line-up, was only ever attached to the 508 and 508 SW and was effectively killed off in the UK in December last year after those models were culled.

But when asked at the brand’s recent ‘E-Lion Day’ if there were any plans for an electric 208 GTi, Favey replied: “I’m very eager to connect the Peugeot brand with what it stands for to

New 208 GTi could pave the way for an electric Vauxhall Corsa VXR



AUTOCAR
IMAGE

its past, to its heritage in every sense. So we will look back at what the heritage of the brand is and we will see to what extent this can

be adapted to the modern world. And there is nothing excluded in our review of this – and certainly not the GTi badge, for sure.”

It would make sense for an e-208 GTi to use the same set-up as the new Abarth 600e, which is based on the same Stellantis platform as the e-208.

This sports crossover is offered with either 237bhp or 278bhp going through its front wheels.

An e-208 GTi would be likely to spawn a hot version of the Vauxhall Corsa Electric too, given that the two superminis are developmentally twinned.

WILL RIMELL

“I’m very keen to connect the brand to its heritage”



Previous-gen 208 GTi used a 197bhp turbo petrol four

Q&A ALAIN FAVEY, CEO, PEUGEOT

What is Peugeot’s plan for future models? Sporty? Cheaper? Anything else?

“All of it! We are obviously reviewing at the moment and need to wait for the proper time to announce this.”

The industry is changing to give hybrids more time. Will future Peugeot models be multi-energy or electric-only?

“The strategy is quite clear: we’ve been very

successful with the multi-energy strategy over the past few years, and for the future we have developed platforms which are basically dedicated to electric vehicles. So definitely you know what will happen in 10 years. As for the next few years, the strategy isn’t changed.”

EV sales growth is slowing globally. What’s the problem?

“There has been clearly

a trend we’ve seen in some markets last year. But again, with the strategy we have with our multi-energy platforms, we are in the best position to be flexible. But all the efforts we make to accelerate or to ease the adoption of electric vehicles will contribute to a quicker adoption, and I think that is again our responsibility to work hard in that direction.”



...AS DOOR OPENS FOR RENAULTSPORT REVIVAL



THE RENAULTSPORT sub-brand may return despite the Renault Group's focus on Alpine for performance machinery, CEO Luca de Meo has said.

"Officially, the Renaultsport badge we put in the fridge, and everything sporty would be building on Alpine, but it didn't mean that sometimes this thing wouldn't be revived," he told Autocar last week.

"I've been asked why

the new 5 Turbo 3E [electric mega-hatch] is not an Alpine, and I said: 'Sorry, because the 5 Turbo was never an Alpine, it was a Renault, and if you want to do something authentic, you've got to respect the history of the thing, so it's going to be a yellow car.' Of course, you can customise the product, but this is the thing. So I don't limit necessarily to Alpine."

There hasn't been a Renaultsport model since

the fourth-generation Mégane RS hot hatch was taken off sale in 2023.

What's more, the former Renaultsport base at Dieppe was returned to Alpine ownership when the brand was relaunched with the A110 sports car in 2017.

Indeed, there has been a great deal of continuity between the two divisions. For instance, Jean-Pascal Dauce, the project lead for the recently launched A110 R Ultime hardcore special,

De Meo didn't want
"insane mini-supercar"
5 Turbo 3E to be an Alpine



was the chief engineer of the iconic Mégane R26.R from 2008.

Renault brand CEO Fabrice Cambolive previously told Autocar that while "speaking about Renaultsport

without any products is not essential", his team will "see what we can do" if the 5 Turbo 3E proves a success, adding: "Let's build our 'sportivity' step by step."
KRIS CULMER

VW'S £25K ELECTRIC CROSSOVER ALMOST READY



VOLKSWAGEN WILL REVEAL a supermini-sized electric crossover called the ID 2X at the Munich motor show in September.

Previewed by a sketch last year, the ID 2X is a taller sibling of the Polo-sized ID 2 hatchback, which is due later this year, and will effectively serve as an EV alternative to the T-Cross.

It will sit on the same shortened version of the MEB platform as the ID 2

and be about 4.1m long, with a 2.6m wheelbase.

Volkswagen design chief Andreas Mindt has described it as a "safe, confident, bold" design that is "simple, like the ID 2all" concept.

The ID 2X is set to be offered exclusively with a single motor on the front axle, giving 223bhp, and a choice of 38kWh and 56kWh batteries, the latter providing a range of

around 280 miles.

The smaller-battery ID 2X is set to be one of the cheapest electric crossovers on the market, in line with Volkswagen's ambitious strategy to lower the production costs and list prices of its EVs.

The ID 2 is planned to be available from £22,000 (only slightly more than today's Polo), so the ID 2X should go on sale at around the £25,000 mark.

MERC PUTS SOLID-STATE BATTERY ON THE ROAD

New EV technology gives prototype 25% more range than standard EQS

Mercedes-Benz is testing a solid-state battery that could unlock a range of more than 620 miles on a single charge, with the first production car to use it scheduled to arrive before the end of the decade.

Preliminary trials are being carried out to evaluate the efficiency, durability and performance of the new battery, which has been jointly created by the German car maker and American specialist Factorial Energy.

Mercedes is using an EQS saloon to test the battery, which first took to the road

earlier this month. It has been lightly modified for the task, with work mainly focused on revising the battery housing.

Within the housing is a floating cell carrier featuring pneumatic actuators developed by Mercedes' Formula 1 engineers in the UK. This system manages the expansion and contraction of materials inside the cells during charging and discharging for improved battery stability and longevity.

While Mercedes has yet to disclose the full technical specifications of the prototype battery, it has

confirmed that the EQS's existing 12-module battery compartment allows for flexible configurations and capacities.

It claims the new battery offers an approximately 25% increase in range compared with a conventional lithium ion battery of equivalent size and weight.

The 450+ version of the EQS is currently the longest-range EV on sale in the UK (see below), getting 511 miles from its vast 118kWh battery. Mercedes expects its new

solid-state battery to push the EQS prototype's range beyond 620 miles in real-world driving conditions.

Factorial, which has also partnered Hyundai and Stellantis, confirmed in June last year that it had supplied Mercedes with cells that had an energy density of up to 391Wh/kg and a charging capacity exceeding 106Ah. This equates to only 85kW with 800V electricals but will be increased as development continues.

The battery also holds a patented new lithium-metal anode and polymer separator.

The technology being trialled in the EQS prototype marks an initial step towards a more advanced solid-state battery, codenamed Solstice, which Mercedes and Factorial are jointly developing. The next-generation battery replaces the polymer separator with a sulphide-based solid electrolyte, targeting an energy density of 450Wh/kg and an estimated 80% range increase over today's lithium ion batteries.

"Merc expects a real-world range beyond 620 miles"

OFFICIAL PICTURE



THE LONGEST-RANGE EVs ON SALE TODAY



Mercedes-Benz EQS 450+
511 miles



Audi A6 E-tron Sportback Performance
463 miles



Polestar 3 Long Range
438 miles



Tesla Model 3 Long Range
436 miles



Volkswagen ID 7 Pro S
436 miles

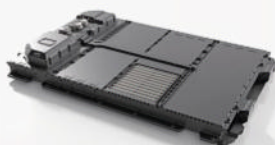
Additionally to the new battery technology, Mercedes is pushing ahead with the development of new-generation silicon-carbide inverters and power electronics. Currently under development at AMG High Performance Powertrains in Northamptonshire, they are designed to bring higher power efficiency and improved performance to the car maker's future models.

Mercedes' confirmation that it is testing solid-state battery technology in a modified EQS is expected to precede the launch of a new development concept, following the approach taken with the 2022 Vision EQXX streamliner – a car that has shaped the imminent new CLA.

This future concept will showcase technology that is expected to be used on Mercedes' new line of compact cars.

GREG KABLE

WHAT MAKES SOLID STATE SO SPECIAL?

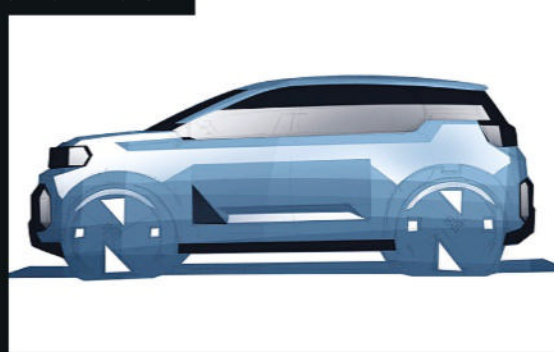


Solid-state batteries are seen as crucial to EV longevity, because they offer greater capacity and more range than equivalent-sized lithium ion batteries used today.

Today's batteries are composed of an anode and a cathode at opposite ends of the cell, with a physical separator preventing them from touching and a gel-like liquid in the middle. In a solid-state battery, the make-up is simplified: the liquid is replaced by a solid block, which is lighter than its counterpart and can carry more energy within the same capacity.

The removal of the liquid element also means the end of range drop-offs caused by high or low temperatures and enables faster charging speeds.

OFFICIAL PICTURE



NEW BABY DACIA FOR 2027

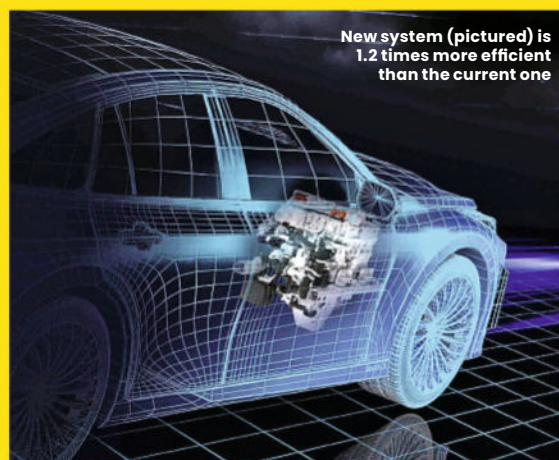
Dacia has begun development of a new electric city car for Europe as a successor to the Spring EV.

Closely related to the new Renault Twingo EV, it's expected to make significant gains in performance, technology and capability.

Unlike the China-built Spring, it will be produced in Europe, thereby avoiding EU import tariffs.

Renault Group CEO Luca de Meo promised the new car will match the Spring's circa-€18,000 (£15,000) price. "We're preparing to go one step further in terms of EV affordability," he said.

He also said it will be ready for market in just 16 months' time, adding: "I defy any competitor in the world to do that."



New system (pictured) is 1.2 times more efficient than the current one

HYDROGEN TOYOTAS TO MAKE BIG GAINS

TOYOTA IS WORKING on a third-generation hydrogen fuel cell system yielding twice the power output – about 260kW – and 20% longer range yet no increase in size.

Designed for production from 2027, it's primarily aimed at Japan's heavy-duty commercial vehicle class, comprising machines such as diggers, but will also feature in passenger vehicles, suggesting that Toyota is readying a third-generation Mirai FCEV for around the same time.

Last year, Thiebault Paquet, Toyota Europe's hydrogen boss, said he

believed the company "can rebuild the story" and "hydrogen will come; this is something we're convinced about".

Toyota claimed its new fuel cell system will be twice as durable as its current one, aiming for it to be on a par with diesel engines, while costing significantly less to produce.

The Japanese firm isn't alone in backing the alternative fuel. Hyundai is working on a second iteration of its Nexo FCEV, while BMW plans to launch a range of FCEVs featuring Toyota fuel cells, starting with a next-generation X5.

Next big thing

JESSE CROSSE

ZF's I2SM is said to have the same torque and power density as a PMSM



WHY FIRMS ARE PUTTING A NEW SPIN ON MOTOR TECH

THE PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED with rare and difficult-to-obtain materials – as used in motors that power EVs as well as batteries – provide a good reason for focusing on recycling and finding alternatives.

Most EVs have permanent magnet synchronous motors (PMSMs), where the rotor has permanent magnets embedded in it that are attracted to a rotating magnetic field generated using power from the battery. Magnets made from rare earth elements (REEs) are far more powerful than any other kind but raise the question of economic security. (China dominates the market for rare earth elements, with 70-80% of the supply.)

A project established in 2019 with the hefty title Sustainable Recovery, Reprocessing and Reuse of Rare-Earth Magnets in a European Circular Economy is aiming to make the process more effective. Nineteen European partners are involved, including ZF, which is evaluating recycled REEs for use in new motors and developing designs that make electric motors easier to recycle.

These powerful magnets are tricky to separate from the rotor and they break up into a magnetised powder that sticks to other ferrous scrap. But a new method called hydrogen processing of magnet scrap (HPMS), developed at Birmingham University, produces a non-magnetic, reusable powder without removing magnets from the rotor first.

The rare earth-rich powder can be reprocessed into new magnets while avoiding traditional energy-intensive methods, so the energy used to produce magnets is 12% of that

needed to make them from virgin material.

ZF has built and tested motors made using HPMS and found the performance of the magnets was almost identical to those manufactured using freshly mined materials.

Another way of reducing the need for virgin REEs is not to use permanent magnets at all. Externally, or separately, excited synchronous motors replace the permanent magnets in the rotors with electromagnetic windings and have been used by Renault since the launch of the Zoe in 2012. Feeding an electric current from the outside of the motor into the rotating core involves the use of brushes so the motor isn't 'brushless' like a PMSM.

One alternative that avoids the use of brushes is ZF's I2SM (in-rotor inductive excited synchronous motor). This has a small electronic generator called an inductive exciter, uniquely fitting inside the rotor shaft rather than on the end, which makes the motor longer. It works on the same principle as wirelessly charging a car or mobile phone, generating current that in turn is used to create a magnetic field in the rotor. ZF claims the same power and torque density as a PMSM equivalent and the motor also fits into a similar space, making it easier for car manufacturers using PMSMs to make the switch.



I2SM uses no rare-earth magnets



CAR FIRMS: NEW TAXES WILL STIFLE EV DEMAND FURTHER

Road tax and the expensive car supplement will apply to EVs from 1 April

Car makers, already under the cosh to sell more EVs, are concerned that sales could be further impeded "at a crucial time for the industry" by new rules to include EVs in the so-called expensive car supplement (ECS) from 1 April this year.

The changes will scrap EVs' long-standing exemption from road tax, and EVs costing more than £40,000 will also be hit with a further £3100 in tax.

This means that all new EVs will now be affected, incurring a first-year rate of £10, rising to £195 from

year two. New EVs costing over £40,000 will also incur the ECS of an extra £425 annually (which rises from the current £410) from the second until the sixth year.

The idea behind the ECS when first imposed by the Conservative government in 2017 was to squeeze a bit more money out of those judged able to afford it.

However, the £40,000 threshold hasn't changed since then and the car industry is now appealing to the current Labour government to raise it.

Car makers argue that the higher build cost of

EVs, mainly because of expensive battery materials, has resulted in many more EVs than combustion models being included within the threshold.

They say imposing taxes on these cars goes against what the zero-emission vehicle (ZEV) mandate is trying to achieve and the government should instead be helping buyers by offering incentives on EVs.

Eurig Druce, managing director of Stellantis UK, told Autocar: "We'd like to see a review of this new taxation, with a raised threshold, so that UK drivers have fewer

barriers in order to make the switch to electric cars."

Ford has also criticised the move. "Introducing VED for EVs from April risks slowing adoption at a crucial time for the industry," the company said in a statement to Autocar.

Although £40,000 is undeniably still a lot of money, the motor industry argues that the car market has changed hugely since the tax was first imposed.

Mike Hawes, CEO of the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, said: "The threshold for the ECS – dubbed the 'luxury

car tax' when launched – has remained unchanged at £40,000 since it was set eight years ago, when the overall market was 30% larger than today and BEVs barely featured."

In fact, £40,000 is below the current average price of an electric car, which stands at £48,559, according to data from Jato Dynamics. That compares with £30,544 for the average combustion car and £32,052 for hybrids. Only the plug-in hybrid drivetrain, with its skew towards big premium SUVs, is more expensive on average, at £54,133.

OFFICIAL PICTURES



Update suggests petrol XC60 could stay on sale for longer than previously thought

XC60 GETS NEW LEASE OF LIFE

THE VOLVO XC60 has been updated with a new look and an upgraded interior in a bid to maintain the appeal of the brand's best-selling model.

That the petrol-powered XC60 has received an update so close to the release of its EX60 electric counterpart (due next year) indicates it will remain on sale for the foreseeable future.

It follows a suggestion

from Volvo boss Jim Rowan that the larger XC90 could remain on sale into the next decade.

The key visual change to the XC60 is its new grille, which brings it into line with the XC90. Inside, the car gets a larger, 11.2in infotainment touchscreen and higher-quality materials.

Powertrains are unchanged, meaning there is a choice of a 248bhp mild

hybrid or two plug-in hybrids with outputs of 345bhp and 449bhp.

Prices are set to be confirmed next month. The current car starts from £46,115.



"EVs ARE ESSENTIALS, NOT LUXURIES"

The additional tax is another headache for car makers, which this year must ensure new EVs account for 28% of their total sales in the UK, up from 22% last year, under the ever-tightening demands of the ZEV mandate. Some flexibility is still in place to soften that target but most car makers remain reliant on discounts to entice customers, to the detriment of profits.

SMMT boss Mike Hawes (pictured) said: "Affordability remains a major barrier to uptake, hence the need for compelling measures to boost demand, and not just from manufacturers."

The SMMT wants the threshold for the expensive car supplement to be raised or removed altogether for electric cars.

"That would send the message that EVs are essentials, not luxuries," said Hawes. "Rather than penalising EV buyers, we should be taking every step to encourage more drivers to make the switch."



Cheapest Macan when ECS was introduced was £46k. Today it's £56k



The entire market has shifted upwards since 2017. Back then, a Porsche Macan – arguably many people's idea of an entry luxury car – could be bought from £45,945. Now, a new one costs from £56,000 and the EV version starts at £68,500.

Even more recently, the Hyundai Ioniq 5 in second-rung Premium trim has risen from £39,295 at its 2021 launch to £42,400 now.

Supporters of the change, such as the government, argue that finally including electric cars in the VED scheme is only fair, given they still don't pay fuel duty.

Car makers are already responding to ensure

models close to the threshold will duck beneath it. For example, in November last year, Vauxhall took as much as £4650 off the price of the Grandland to bring its entry and middle trims below the threshold.

Stellantis sibling brand Abarth did similar earlier in February, cutting the price of the top-level Abarth 600e Scorpionissima from £41,975 to £39,875.

Giuseppe Cava, UK managing director of Fiat and Abarth, said: "We've made the decision to reduce the price of the car and protect our customers from this tax rise."

NICK GIBBS

EVs THAT START AT JUST UNDER THE £40,000 THRESHOLD



Skoda Enyaq 60 SE L
£39,680



Tesla Model 3 Rear-Wheel Drive £39,990



Volkswagen ID 4 Pure Match £39,580



Hyundai Ioniq 5 63kWh Advance
£39,900



Ford Explorer 52kWh Select £39,875



Peugeot e-308 SW Allure £39,050

Grapevine

MARK TISSHAW



Omoda and Jaecoo are using existing dealers to aid brand visibility

MORE CAR BRANDS than ever are competing for fewer new car sales in a UK market well down on its peak, yet new entrants are not being deterred. February marks the formal arrival of Jaecoo, sibling brand to Omoda, which itself entered the UK market only last autumn.

Both are export-only brands from Chinese giant Chery. According to design boss Steve Eum, Jaecoo is positioned as a stable, more mature SUV maker while Omoda is more youthful and playful.

The reason we're getting both at once is a mix of economies of scale around shared architectures and giving buyers a choice, according to UK brand director Victor Zhang. "It doesn't mean we're testing the market to end up choosing one or the other. We want to build these brands together," he said.

The brands have gone all in on a franchise dealer model. They have 71 sites up and running already – a mix of franchises adding Omoda and Jaecoo to their sites or losing or replacing a franchise. They plan to get to 130 by the end of the year, making them around two-thirds the size of Ford.

"The brands might be new to the customers, but the dealers are well established," Zhang told me.

Rather than being hidden online, the brands are visible and in communities where the cars can be test driven and the dealers spoken to. A UK R&D site could be on the cards too.

It's hard to sniff at early progress: 3629 Omodas were registered last year in the UK, which is around the same as other recent new market entrants DS, Genesis and GWM Ora combined.

The brands have also looked to stave off common issues faced by newcomers, such as access to spare parts and insurance by offering a 24-hour turnaround for parts from China through a logistics deal with DHL and working closely with Thatcham to ensure repairs are cheaper.

They have also vowed to make rapid updates to their cars – not just software but hardware too.

The elephant in the room is that the Omoda 5 and Jaecoo 7, the brands' first cars, haven't been great to drive. Yet Eum isn't the first to note that "China moves so quick" in all it does and believes his new brands "have a solid base and fundamentals worked out".

Omoda and Jaecoo have been recruiting heavily from other car makers, including product head Oli Lowe, who joined from Volkswagen. He is inspired by the progress

"Omoda and Jaecoo vow to make fast updates to their cars"

Kia has made and uses that as a reference for Omoda and Jaecoo to follow. So it's no surprise that the cars have seven-year/100,000-mile warranties and good equipment levels.

Revved up about his new employer's potential, Lowe wants "every T-Roc" trade-in going because he was denied gardening leave as Volkswagen told him: "It's not like you're going to a competitor." You suspect he will revel in quoting those words back to Volkswagen one day if all goes to plan.

RENAULT SHARES EV FIRE-FIGHTING TECH

THE RENAULT GROUP has developed a fire suppression system for EVs that drastically reduces the time and water needed to extinguish battery fires.

Called Fireman Access, it allows fires to be extinguished in roughly the same time as on a combustion vehicle. It achieves this by using an adhesive disc that dislodges under pressure from a fire hose, allowing water to quickly spread to all the cells inside the battery.

Renault is making the patents freely available to the wider automotive industry.



Called Fireman Access, it allows an EV fire to be put out as quickly as an ICE car's fire

RISING CAR COSTS DEAL MOTABILITY £565M BLOW

UK's largest fleet pins loss on more expensive cars, insurance, servicing

The UK's biggest fleet, whose "explosive" growth in June last year was credited with helping car makers through a tricky period, has reported losses of more than half a billion pounds – saying this highlights the growing cost of car ownership and volatile resale values of EVs.

Motability Operations, the company behind the Motability charity, buys cars and leases them to people with a qualifying disability allowance for £75.75 per week. The package includes road tax, servicing, insurance, breakdown cover, and tyre and windscreen repair. It has become a major player in the UK car market since its 1977 foundation and now has a fleet of 815,000 cars.

Despite a 15% rise in the number of people joining the scheme last year, the firm posted a £564.6 million pre-tax loss for 2024, a huge drop from the £748m profits it recorded in 2023.

The company, which is owned by four major banks including Barclays and HSBC, blamed rises in the cost of servicing, insurance and new cars, including EVs. It says insurance, for instance, has risen by 46% since 2022, resulting in an additional £700 cost per vehicle over a typical three-year lease.

A further contributing factor was what it called the "reduced value" of the 250,000 ex-lease vehicles it sells to the motor trade each year. Vehicles in the best condition go through its direct disposals business and the rest are put through third-party auctions.



Motability buys cars to lease to people who get a mobility allowance

Even more damning is that the losses came despite the company's revenue actually jumping by 24.4%, from £5.5 billion in 2023 to £6.9bn last year.

As a result, the firm said the increases in its costs will result in new customers paying higher advance lease payments. Currently, this is set at £750.

CEO Andrew Miller said: "With the level of change in the market – driven by rising inflation, higher energy costs and the transition to EVs – drivers across the UK are seeing increasing costs and we are not immune to this.

"Until now, we have been able to protect customers from rising prices, using the profits earned in the immediate post-Covid

period. Our investments will now come to an end and customers will see rising advance [lease] payments."

Despite the losses, Motability looks set to remain a major force in the new and used car markets – it is the biggest single-source supplier of used cars – and, crucially, a key player in the UK's transition to EVs.

The charity says the reduction in the availability of new petrol and diesel cars means its customers are experiencing this transition ahead of the general public. That claim is borne out by their applications for EVs rising in 2024 by 17%, taking EVs' share of the Motability fleet to 9%. The charity is encouraging further growth

by increasing the number of EV models and variants on its scheme. (It currently has around 200 options.)

Motability also calculates that its customers can get into a car at a 48%-cheaper cost than going to a dealer. Such is its pull that last year Guy Pigounakis, commercial director at MG Motor UK, said the "Motability market has just exploded", adding

that "none of us have seen anything like it for decades".

Meanwhile, it has been working with charging partner Ohme to increase the number of Motability home charge points to 66,000 and is developing a 'cross-pavement' charging solution outside customers' homes that could help a further 25% of them access power for their EV.

JOHN EVANS



Motability customers are ahead of the wider public in adopting EVs

M5 GEARS UP FOR BMW'S NEW-ERA LOOK WITH FACELIFT

SPY SHOT



BMW IS SET to give the M5 a Neue Klasse makeover.

The V8 plug-in hybrid super-saloon was revealed in only June last year but the latest spy photos show it with a new front end that replaces the large kidneys with the Vision Neue Klasse EV concept's thinner nose and angled headlights.

This design will be emblematic of BMW's next-generation cars, starting with the next iX3, due out this year. This SUV will be followed in 2026 by the new 3 Series saloon. As a result, a facelifted M5 isn't expected before 2027.

It would be unusual for a manufacturer to be testing

a prototype so far ahead of launch if the modifications were just visual, suggesting the M5's 717bhp drivetrain could be getting tweaked.

Its cockpit is also likely to be brought into line, technically and visually, with the highly advanced, minimalist cabins of BMW's upcoming Neue Klasse EVs.

MY WEEK IN CARS



Steve Cropley

Fellten has given it a smooth, nippy EV heart but it still feels like a Mini



MONDAY

Another day, another story in the financials about the importance of speed-to-market for new cars. It's a given these days that models won't last longer in production than six years, which is ironic because I reckon owners don't care about such calendar-driven accuracy.

In this era of breakneck technical change, I'm as keen as anyone to see cars improve promptly in agility, safety, refinement and efficiency – and we're seeing that. But we're also seeing dozens of new shapes (from Chinese marques, especially) that look inoffensively similar to absolutely everything else on the market. To me, most lack a visual purpose, one reason why we enthusiasts take such special interest in cars with back stories: the new Fiat 500 and Panda, new Renault 5 and Alpine A110, new Mini and Range Rover. I'm not sure what the answer to better visual satisfaction is, but I'm sure today's car designers need to chew on it.

TUESDAY

A man will arrive soon to collect my Genesis Electrified G80, many thousands of miles after



Electrified G80 long-term test car has been a big hit

“I drove a classic Mini and the experience was chastening”

being delivered – a tally that surely proves how useful it has been. I was pretty sure when it arrived last year that this car would serve me well but I didn't expect to bond with it. Yet this morning on the way home from my favourite car valeters, I had one of those drives whose enjoyment stays with you: brisk rather than fast, quiet because that's the G80's forte, and with performance boosted and steering sharpened by the Sport driving regime I prefer when range isn't the issue. This has been a great car. Reduce the bounce on big bumps, give it 50% more boot space and you'd have the perfect saloon.

THURSDAY

I spent most of the day at Fellten, a remarkable EV tech company that can do it all: electrify your classic, build you a bespoke battery, teach you about EV underbits and rent you a portable 10-car EV charging station. I'll talk more about this soon but, in the meantime, I took a drive in the company's electrified Issigonis Mini, a classic city car with a 100-mile range and an 8.0sec 0-60mph time.

It's been years since I drove a classic Mini and the experience was chastening. The only modern bit was the excellent EV powertrain, which was smooth and nippy. The car itself was beguilingly tiny and amazingly well packaged, and its kart-like steering was still special. But I'd forgotten it comes from an era when you must scan the road in order to avoid bumps a modern car would hardly notice. There will always be people who swear by old Minis as ideal transport to Naples

on holiday, but the truth is that nowadays the original 'brick' is a toy.

FRIDAY

Given the world's population has doubled from four billion since 1975, it gets harder to achieve things that are truly unique. But Andy Plumb, a Bentley designer, has surely taken the prize by launching, in the past couple of years, fascinating books about two of Britain's oddest vehicles, the Reliant Robin (Tipping Point: Designing a Great British Underdog) and the latest Morgan three-wheeler (Super 3 – Design by Adventure).

Beside his writer's role, Plumb had a big hand in designing both the last Reliant and the latest three-wheeled Mog and he drives a well-kept Robin to work in Crewe when he feels like it. I'm not quite sure why he's so keen on cars with one less wheel than normal (plus 50% more chances to feel the bumps) but I do know the world needs more people like him to protect us from automotive group-think.

AND ANOTHER THING

PalmerSport has just launched a passport to driving excitement called a Friends and Family Day: you round up everyone you reckon you can beat on a track, get to Bedford Autodrome in time for an early bacon sarnie and spend the rest of the day competing with your group (under quality instruction) in disciplines ranging from Land Rovers to F3000 single-seaters. At £885 plus VAT per person it's no giveaway, but what price do you put on all-time bragging rights?



GET IN TOUCH

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PRIOR CONVICTION

Matt Prior

Jeep has had quite the week. Initially things went rather well for it, because it convinced Harrison Ford to star in its Super Bowl half-time commercial, which not surprisingly was received very fondly. Ford teased himself about his name being Ford and teased Ford itself for copying the Wrangler with the Bronco. You can imagine the marketing teams sharing high fives. Until, that is, somebody reported their Jeep was serving them advertisements in a pop-up on its touchscreen that, try as they might, they couldn't get rid of.

They would tell the pop-up to go away and it would, for a few minutes, before reappearing again the next time – and every time – they came to a stop, offering to connect them to an operator so that they could purchase an extended warranty. Someone else then reported their Jeep doing the same.

It drove these owners mad, and I can understand why. Last week, my work phone kept reminding me via a pop-up, often mid-text or email, that I should update its operating software to the latest version – something I had been avoiding, because friends and colleagues and the wider internet had told me it would ruin the photo and email apps.

As I dismissed each pop-up, I wanted to put the darned thing in the microwave, and it's not even my phone. If I'd have dropped fifty grand on a new car that insisted on trying to get me to phone an extended warranty department, the call I'd actually make would be to an insurer to explain that there has been a terrible accident and that my car was at the bottom of a ravine, on fire, so could I please have the money to replace it with something different?

Thankfully – so very, very thankfully – Jeep says the message repetition was delivered in



error. As it explained to American website The Autopian, the note was meant to appear once (this may still seem one too many times to you) and disappear and not return once dismissed. It said it had contacted the affected owners and already corrected this “glitch”.

This hasn't made everyone's concerns go away, though. News stories, features and social media posts – both hinged and, obviously, unhinged – point to Jeep owner Stellantis's aim to collect €20 billion from software initiatives by the end of the decade.

It's reported that in 2023 Stellantis told a US customer “ads are part of your contractual agreement with [radio broadcaster] Sirius XM” when those appeared on their car's screen.

And, of course, plenty of these stories also reference controversial subscription services like those offered by BMW, which has rowed

“People's concerns are stoked by how plausible it seems”

back on some but not all of them. Right now, it's still offering speed camera information for £25 a year and parking assistance or driving plus assistant for £19 and £35 respectively *per month*. This, remember, is to access hardware features that are already fitted to the car.

In other words, people's concerns about ads appearing unwanted on their car's screens are stoked simply by how plausible it seems: ‘It's just what they'd do.’ You'd like to think they wouldn't, but see how instead of walking 10 metres into the departures lounge, air passengers must now walk a circuitous 200 metres through a shop.

I would take whichever goon came up with that idea and sentence them to walk through a fug of perfume, tripping over wheelie bags that, by the way, clearly aren't hand luggage, for the total time that passengers have wasted trudging along these curvy corridors (that makes them sound rather more alluring than they are).

Last time I was in this forced retail environment, I looked up how many air passengers there were per year, and the answer was 4.5 billion. So if one in five of those wastes a minute at an airport that has adopted this practice, that's 1711 years and two months.

If you were in the meeting where this new reality was signed off, I'd cover your bedroom floor with upturned plugs that you'd have to tread on and crawl across every single night for the rest of your life. Preferably beyond.

I digress. I'm pleased to find that the Jeep scare was just a one-off, not something that heralded a new policy. The reaction to it should serve as a cautionary tale for any car maker that's thinking of actually adopting it. Should – but will it?

GET IN TOUCH

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GETTY IMAGES

RACING LINES



Damien Smith



Evans was at his best in Sweden following a fine showing in France

What a turn-up. Elfyn Evans missed a golden chance to win the World Rally Championship last year when his Toyota team-mate Kalle Rovanperä cocked a snook to a title hat-trick by choosing to compete only part-time. Now Rovanperä is back full-time and was expected to reassume his place as the head of the GR Yaris attack. Instead, indifferent form on the Monte Carlo Rally and in the snow of Sweden has left the Finn 30 points down on the Brit, who in stark contrast has made a stellar start to 2025.

SNOW STOPPING EVANS

Second to fellow Toyota driver Sébastien Ogier on the Monte, Evans delivered a Swedish snow storm in a fantastic rally-long duel with another GR Yaris, driven by Takamoto Katsuta. The Japanese driver, chasing his first WRC win, pressured Evans all the way. Just 0.6sec down after the long Friday leg, he was still only 3.0sec off on Saturday night, then sensationally turned his deficit into a 4.5sec lead first thing on Sunday morning. Evans responded magnificently to snatch back the top spot on the penultimate test, then won the Power Stage to triumph in style. The team-mates were separated by just 3.8sec, making this the closest-ever Rally Sweden.

"It has been an amazing weekend," said a delighted Evans after his second Swedish win and the 10th of his WRC career, which equals the tally of the late, great Richard Burns. "We led for a lot of the rally, but the margins were always tight and it was never really comfortable. This morning I got caught napping a bit in the first stage by Taka, who really made me fight for it, and thankfully we managed to turn it around and unlock good pace on the next stage."

Ogier is second in the points but continues to insist on rallying only part-time. Rovanperä can still make up the 30 points with a dozen rallies to go. But this isn't the script we had expected.

"We couldn't really have dreamed of much better"

"Overall, it has been a difficult weekend for me," said Rovanperä after his lacklustre fifth place, following an anonymous fourth on the Monte. "We were trying to push hard but we couldn't have the pace or the performance that we wanted, even on this final day."

"It's a big disappointment, but this is the only snow rally in the season and now we need to focus on the next rally on gravel with a completely different tyre and work to be stronger there."

As for Evans, his confidence after a glum 2024 must be sky-high. "It has been a very good start to the season for us," he said. "We couldn't really have dreamed of much better."

ROWLAND ON ELECTRIC FORM

Another Brit enjoying a strong early bid for a first world championship is Oliver Rowland. The 32-year-old has won two of the opening four rounds for Nissan in Formula E and



Could Rowland become a Formula E champion in his seventh season?

holds a convincing 17-point lead over McLaren's impressive rookie, Taylor Barnard.

This month, the electric single-seater series raced in Jeddah for the first time, for a double-header on a shortened version of the Formula 1 track. Rowland led the opener, which featured fast-charging pit stops for the first time, only for Maximilian Günther to pull a cool outside move on the run to the final chicane on the last lap to claim his first win since switching to DS Penske. But Rowland made up for that disappointment with a dominant win in the stopless second race, to lead Barnard, Jake Hughes and Jake Dennis in an unprecedented British one-two-three-four.

As in the WRC, there are still another 12 rounds to go in Formula E – plenty of time for the picture to change. But Rowland has shown a promising consistency so far in what is a deeply competitive championship. Can he keep himself fully in the frame until the double-header finale in London on 26-27 July?

BYRON'S POETIC FINISH

Over in the States, the 67th Daytona 500 finished in a typical smoky haze of chaos.

Denny Hamlin appeared to be sitting pretty for his fourth victory in The Great American Race – patronised this year by president Donald Trump, who flew in on Air Force One and led the field in a cavalcade lap before the start. But Hamlin was undone by last-lap contact on the back stretch triggered by Cole Custer (brilliant Nascar name). William Byron (much less likely Nascar name) kept his foot in up by the wall and emerged with the lead. His Chevrolet tore across the strip 0.113sec ahead of Tyler Reddick's Toyota to claim his second consecutive victory at the 500.

The 27-year-old openly admitted that luck had fallen his way but added that instinct was also at play after heading onto the back stretch in sixth.

"Crazy. I can't honestly believe that," he said. "But we're here. So proud of it."

YOUR VIEWS

WRITE TO autocar@haymarket.com

FILM CRITICS

In the February edition of Porsche Post, there was an article entitled 'PPF insurance warning', in which Andy Couper, head of specialist motor trade at Porsche's insurance partner Lockton, stated: "Technically, PPF is a modification and should be included in the total sum insured for the vehicle."

My car had paint protection film and so, having read Couper's comments, I informed my insurer, Aviva Direct, of this.

They advised me that this modification resulted in a decline and gave me seven days to find alternative cover. There was no offer of a loading to the policy, just a straightforward decline.

I have sought quotations through some brokers for cover, including Lockton, who quoted me just over £2700 on a specialist policy – which would have been with Aviva!

What is it about PPF that the insurance industry doesn't like?

David Pratt

Chandler's Ford, Hampshire

Aviva said: "We cannot comment on this specific case. However, if a car has PPF fitted as standard by the manufacturer, this does not count as a modification and does not need to be declared. If it has been added since the car was manufactured, or if a customer is looking to install PPF on their car, this is something that will need to be declared, as it may affect their cover. It is important that customers let us know about any modifications to their car when the policy is taken out as some modifications could, for example, impact the car's performance, the cost and time of any repairs and its desirability to thieves."

EVASIVE ACTION

I'm sure the Germans have a word for it: that nagging sense that, although you're trying your best, you've still done something wrong.

On my recent drive from Reigate in Surrey to Hampstead (via Hanger Lane etc), the couple of innocent hiccups I made were, I swear, the result of impatient and aggressive driving by those around me (stand up, matt black Defender and large white hire van drivers). But would the powers that be differentiate between someone doing their best and deliberate rule-breaking?

I'll get my coat. And a train ticket next time.

Richard Houghton
Via email



*Letter
of the
week*

LET THE PUBLIC DECIDE

I read with disappointment in Autocar's response to the ZEV mandate consultation (News, 5 February) that it "supports the electrification of the UK car parc". I'd have hoped a magazine for car enthusiasts would have taken a more balanced approach to what seems like a government obsession with forcing the public into EVs.

I'm not convinced that the policy of simply banning ICE cars has been well thought through, even if it's solely looked at through the lens of environmentalism, or has substantial majority support from the public.

The UK is a small country, so its emissions will always be negligible on a global scale, yet it has among the most aggressive EV policies in the world – and yet the motoring establishment has no appetite for pushing back. Any assessment of the environmental benefits of EVs should factor in every aspect of environmental damage, as well as considering events in the wider world – not least in the US, where there won't be much appetite from the new president to deny Americans the opportunity to continue buying and driving ICE cars.

The UK's ZEV deadline is less than five years away, and the only reason car makers are coming anywhere near close to the ever more aggressive targets is the substantial tax breaks given to benefit fleet EV sales. You have to question whether tax breaks of this kind are a good use of public money at a time when national finances, the very high tax burden on the public and our public services are in such a difficult position.

Private buyers still overwhelmingly favour ICE cars over EVs, and I suspect that this would remain the case regardless of any bribes the government might introduce. There are a whole variety of reasons for this, but the sheer convenience and pleasure of driving an economical, well-designed ICE car has to be a factor.

I don't trust governments to know best regarding the types of cars we should buy. Just look at the early 2000s, when the tax system sought to encourage us to buy diesel cars because of lower CO₂ emissions but with no regard to NO_x emissions, which only became a concern during the subsequent scandals.

It's much better to give the public choice than try to force the market with this dogma of 'electric good, petrol bad'. If EVs really do turn out to be so much better, there will be no need to ban ICE cars: the public will choose them without being forced to. Sadly, it looks like we're soon going to be denied this choice.

Mark Finch, via email



MAKE ALFA BETTER

I don't have an opinion about the cancelled Nissan-Honda merger but fully agree with Matt Prior about sharing within car-making groups (Prior Conviction, 19 February).

The Volkswagen Group makes some sense to me, but Stellantis no – as an enthusiast and an Alfista, even more so. The Tonale? A nicer Peugeot. The Junior? Better, I've read, but only in hot form.

I've just got myself a Mk1 Stelvio 2.2d Veloce, and while I don't have



experience of the German cars, I can honestly say it's attractive, powerful, great-handling, semi-premium inside and a real Alfa that, like the sister Giulia, isn't based on anything else. No touchscreen, the visor clip gap is too large and the turning circle could be smaller, which came across as deal-breakers in the reviews, but at 99,000km it seems solid and everything works.

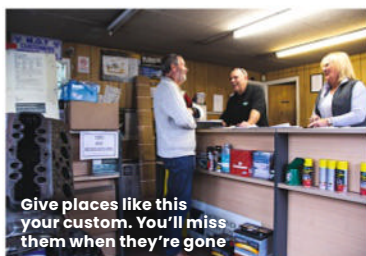
However, I've read that the next Stelvio will be based on a shared platform. Mr Stellantis, could

you please make it an Alfa first and then give watered-down versions to the other brands, at least?

Manolis K
Via autocar.co.uk

MY HAPPY PLACE

I loved Felix Page's article on motor factors (Why I love, 5 February). I've read it three times now (how sad). So many memories of these places. They're totally and utterly brilliant. I still have some points and a condenser for Volkswagen Beetles



and wiper blades for an Alfasud.

Ours in Keynsham, Bristol, has gone now: three staff and the boss. It served me and my mates well. Unbelievable that they *always* had the most diverse item in stock.

Recently someone smashed the heated mirror glass on my wife's new Vauxhall Corsa. The motor factor in a nearby town had a choice of replacements. A huge emporium – five staff. Long may it live.

Andrew Poulton
Via email

A FAMILIAR STORY

Following Michael Cohen's letter in the 12 February issue, I can confirm that the AA took much the same action with me, from a regular payment of £145 to a sudden hike to £220, at which point I complained and was assured it wouldn't happen again. At the time of my renewal, in May last year, I was informed that £325 would be my new renewal premium, at which point I cancelled my membership.

I'm now with Green Flag and have nothing to report – yet.

I've no doubt that doing business of any kind becomes more fraught and devoid of trust as a result of such opportunist profiteering eroding public confidence.

JR Richardson
Droemer, Cumbria

MESSAGE FOR HOLYROOD

Scotland has more than 35,000 miles of road, of which 623 are motorway or dual carriageway. The SNP is proposing to reduce the maximum speed limit for cars to 50mph on all single-carriageway and single-track roads that don't already have lower limits. This proposal is unnecessary and unwanted – and should it happen here, how long before it's suggested for the rest of the UK?

All those who live in Scotland or who just enjoy driving here should respond to the consultation now (visit tinyurl.com/scotlandspeeds). It closes on 5 March, so time is short.

David Bridge
Skippness, Argyll

Weekly winner

Letter of the week wins this ValetPro exterior protection and maintenance kit worth £48



GREAT REASONS TO BUY

Next week's issue

ON SALE 5 MARCH

COMPARISON



DACIA SPRING vs LEAPMOTOR T03

Britain's cheapest EV takes on a closely matched new UK arrival – a Stellantis-backed Chinese-brand competitor that's made in Europe

ROAD TEST



PORSCHE 911 GT3

Does hybridisation enhance its appeal or dilute it? Our testers reveal all

FEATURE



LIFE IN THE SAAB LANE

Colin Goodwin opens up about the reality of running a 9-3 Convertible

EVERY WEEK

LIVING WITH A...



CUPRA TAVASCAN

Electric crossover has a tough act to follow in the brilliant Born. Will it rise to the challenge?

USED GUIDE



ASTON VANTAGE

How to get hold of this achingly beautiful and addictively entertaining sports car for less

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The original car magazine, published since 1895 'in the interests of the mechanically propelled road carriage'

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HOW WE TEST CARS

Autocar delivers several kinds of reviews on new cars, with different levels of technical and functional scrutiny. As the name suggests, our First Drives section typically addresses cars that we're driving for the first time – either in final production form or as late prototypes. Time in the car can be limited here, technical and equipment specification might not be finalised and some systems software may not be to production specification. For those reasons, First Drive reports don't have star ratings.

Once we have driven a car for a second time in the UK, in right-hand-drive form and typically at greater length, we will rate it, either as part of a shorter UK test report or as the subject of a full, instrumented Road Test.

In the latter case, we take empirical performance and refinement benchmarks from it at Horiba MIRA proving ground, as well as subjective limit handling impressions, plus key measurements of practicality, efficiency and kerb weight.

All UK tests and Road Tests receive proper verdicts with star ratings informed by everything we have learned and the combined impressions and experience of several testers.

FIRST DRIVES

TESTED 29.1.25, LISBON, PORTUGAL DELIVERIES AUTUMN

FERRARI 12CILINDRI SPIDER

Unlimited head room is now on offer in the 819bhp GT

Ferrari's 12Cilindri coupé is a more relaxed-feeling car than the 812 Superfast that preceded it because of the existence of the SF90.

With the SF as the brand's performance leader, it meant that, when developing the 12Cilindri, Ferrari was able to lean into its grand touring capabilities more than it had in the recent past. It didn't need to be the most powerful, most focused coupé in the range.

Now, then, to the 12Cilindri Spider, the folding-topped version of Ferrari's grandest tourer, which will go on sale this autumn and cost from £366,500 before you specify a single option, and you can bet a Ferrari retailer will encourage you to do that.

In its mechanical make-up, the Spider is mostly similar to the coupé. It has the same 6.5-litre V12 with 819bhp and the only significant changes are to reinforce the body to cope with lopping the roof off it. Ferrari claims a 15% body

rigidity increase over its 812 GTS predecessor but offers no figures for overall rigidity, or a comparison with the coupé. Body mods, notably reinforcement around A- and B-pillars and thicker sills, and the folding mechanism add 60kg to the coupé's 1560kg (dry) weight.

A fabric roof would have added less but, as head of GT exterior design Andrea Militello told me, a soft top like the Roma's is a

"more romantic" alternative. The 12Cilindri's roof, which folds in 14 seconds at vehicle speeds of up to 28mph, is "a technical roof, a shell that suits speed. You wouldn't go to space with a soft top."

Some of the sci-fi-inspired elements of the coupé's design (which to my mind remains the more elegant of the two 12Cilindris) have been toned down here with the loss of the almost delta-wing rear



Roof deploys in 14sec. Rear window can be partly or fully lowered



TESTER'S NOTE

Haptic steering wheel and dash buttons are less intuitive than conventional buttons, but some have multiple functions. Somewhere, there's an ideal set-up, but it's not here yet. **MP**



window, but I get what he means. It's still striking, of course. The bonnet length is imposing and the Spider has more presence than a vehicle 4.7m long and 2.0m wide (across the body) normally would.

There are suspension tuning differences to take account of the additional weight, and the fact that inevitably the centre of gravity will have shifted upwards and rearwards, but the short of it is that it's meant to retain the natural character of the coupé.

It's still incredibly fast, then – they called the one that came before it the Superfast and that had 30 fewer horsepower than this – but more habitable, less edgy, less frightening. More likely to suit a convertible?

Quite probably. The interior is much like the coupé's, save for the view behind and buttons for the roof. The driving position is sound, and though Ferrari has gone a little over-digital on some switchgear and dials (I think it knows this), it's a great view forwards.



Wind turbulence is negligible and the driving position is good

"The roof is a shell that suits speed. You wouldn't go to space with a soft top"



Spider retains the essential character of the coupé version

All modern Ferraris ride pretty well and there's no exception here. Plus the 12Cilindri has the 'bumpy road' damper setting that takes the edge off the ride in its angrier drive modes. Roof up, you notice a little extra body shimmy, a smidge of loss of rigidity from the coupé. As with many folding hard-topped cars, the roof clicking into place assists things, because it feels like it flexes even more with it down.

Swapping between roof open and closed is a doddle, mind you – so long as you don't have a camera suckered to the windows, which drop completely into the doors during the process (sounds like an 'us' problem really). And with them down, there's limited buffeting, not that your correspondent has a lot of hair to ruffle. The back window can be lowered or raised but defaults to a halfway point that lets in the least neck draught.

Dropping the roof lets you better hear one of the world's great engines, of course. It only shouts really loudly at high revs and in the

racier drive modes. But even above 9000rpm, it's smoothly noisy rather than raucous. It's easy to understand why, despite the rigidity (and, to my eyes, aesthetic) drawbacks, half of 12Cilindris will be Spiders.

Dynamically, the 12Cilindri coupé's character remains largely intact. The steering is fast, at just under two turns lock to lock, and reasonably light, but it doesn't feel nervy. In moving from 812 to 12Cilindri, the wheelbase was shortened by 20mm and the driver now sits closer to the back axle, but it doesn't feel that way. With a later generation of active rear steer plus whatever other magic they get up to, it feels more like you sit in the middle of the 12Cilindri, and less like you're on the rear wheels, holding on like racing a chariot with the horsepower and steering some way in the far distance.

That, as in the coupé, the engine response is calmed down in third and fourth gears, to be more linear, less hyper, and that those are the predominant driving gears on

nice back roads, just enhances the experience. The 12Cilindri is a calmer, cosier, more intimate and chilled drive than other recent Ferrari V12s, and I think the better for it. Let's hope they keep making an SF90.

MATT PRIOR

TECHSPEC FERRARI 12CILINDRI SPIDER

Roof chop results in a noticeable loss in rigidity while retaining the model's inherent character, likeability and stratospheric pace

Price £366,500
Engine V12, 6496cc, petrol
Power 819bhp at 9250rpm
Torque 500lb ft at 7250rpm
Gearbox 8-spd dual-clutch automatic, RWD
Dry weight 1620kg
0-62mph 3.0sec
Top speed 211mph
Economy 17.8mpg
CO₂, tax band 360g/km, 37%
Rivals Aston Martin Vanquish Volante, McLaren 750S Spider

BMW 2 SERIES GRAN COUPE

Can the second-generation version emerge from the 3 Series' shadow?

Of all the BMW 2 Series variants on sale today, you would be forgiven for regarding the Gran Coupé as the oft-forgotten middle sibling. It sits alongside the 2 Series Coupé and the chunkier 2 Series Active Tourer, but it also occupies a difficult market position of being just below the remarkable 3 Series, a shining gem that it has previously struggled to match.

Like its forebear, the new one sits on the UKL2 platform, shared with the X1 SUV and 1 Series hatch. In its basic 220 form, the Gran Coupé sends power to the front wheels but our test car, the range-topping M235 xDrive, is four-wheel drive.

The most obvious differences concern the Gran Coupé's exterior. It was never considered much of a head-turner, but changes introduced for this second-generation car include a new look to match that of the smaller 1 Series.

It's 20mm longer and 25mm taller than before, gaining a new front

end with a more rounded snout. The Gran Coupé also gets mechanical revisions similar to those in the updated 1 Series, including a more rigid body structure and chassis connections, the benefits of which include more precise steering and enhanced agility.

Changes have been made to help improve ride quality, too, with the addition of new frequency-selective shock absorbers.

Our M235 sits 8mm lower than the 220 and gets Sport steering, for improved handling precision, and Adaptive M suspension to boost athleticism and long-distance comfort. The engine bay of this M-badged variant also features a strut brace (optional in the standard 220) and the car sits on 18in wheels.

Increasing the Gran Coupé's length by 20mm was partly to improve interior space. There's certainly enough room up front to accommodate most drivers, while rear leg room and head room below that sloping roofline are passable

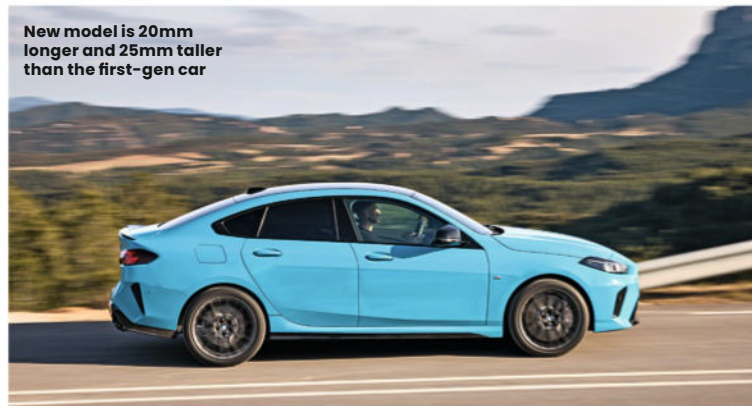
for passengers up to around 6ft tall. The boot measures 430 litres, which is down on the 460 litres offered by the rival Mercedes-Benz CLA.

It's a haven for technology, though. Standard equipment includes BMW's Live Cockpit Plus, which integrates a 10.7in touchscreen with a 10.25in digital instrument cluster, ambient lighting and the latest, ninth-generation

iDrive system. There are heated seats upholstered in faux-leather in what is a largely comfortable cabin, with soft-touch materials on the dashboard, armrests and doors, and smart, hand-milled aluminium trim positioned above the glovebox.

BMW's latest infotainment is clear to read and mostly intuitive to navigate. I was particularly confused by the sat-nav, though,

New model is 20mm longer and 25mm taller than the first-gen car



TESTER'S NOTE

For an even bigger visual impact, the £2075 M Sport Pro package adds gloss black trim, M-branded lights and seatbelts, plus bright red M Sport brake calipers. **JW**



which was distracting and a mess to read on screen. It's a quick and snappy system with augmented reality, panoramic cameras and voice control, but it added a touch of stress to driving in unfamiliar surroundings – and BMW's rotary controller of old is sorely missed.

In the UK, the new Gran Coupé is offered with two powertrain choices. The entry-level 220i is driven by a 1.5-litre three-cylinder turbocharged petrol engine with 167bhp and 48V mild-hybrid assistance. The M235i uses a 2.0-litre turbocharged four-cylinder unit with 296bhp and 295 lb ft, and it can sprint from 0-62mph in 4.9sec. The diesel 220d has been dropped from the range in the UK but it remains available elsewhere in Europe.

We have yet to sample the 220i, but the M235i feels muscular under harder acceleration. Power is delivered smoothly and the car's seven-speed Steptronic transmission is quick to change up yet slow to change down. BMW's turbo four doesn't sound particularly endearing, but it will comfortably match a Mercedes-AMG CLA 35 for performance.

The previous 2 Series Gran Coupé was capable in corners but offered little dynamic sophistication. It's the same with this second-



Perceived quality is good and BMW's latest iDrive set-up works well mostly

"The M235i feels muscular under harder acceleration. Power is delivered smoothly"



M235i range-topper has four-wheel drive and adaptive suspension

generation car, which has capable and direct steering but is short of engagement or excitement.

Despite its competency, there's not much here for the enthusiast, who would most likely receive more enjoyment from the rear-wheel-drive 3 Series. That said, most Gran Coupé drivers will be satisfied with how easy the car is to place, with four-wheel drive and Adaptive M suspension further bolstering its stability. Visibility is excellent too, owing to a near-perfect and easily adjustable driving position.

Ride comfort and general refinement are reasonable and the car soaks up most speed bumps and cobbled streets smoothly. Despite some slight excitability to the ride on the motorway, the Gran Coupé

would be a fine long-distance car – with the caveat that we haven't yet driven it in the UK, where our battered roads could be its undoing.

In M235i guise, it's quick enough and its mechanical changes are welcome, but it's not quite as dynamic or engaging to drive as an M Sport-badged car could and should be. Many of its qualities are satisfactory rather than superb, and the regular 2 Series Coupé is more rewarding for the enthusiast.

Ultimately, though, for drivers who want a practical, athletic saloon-cum-coupé, the Gran Coupé makes some sense. The trouble is, at this price, you could just get a 3 Series, albeit a slower one – and, on this evidence, you probably should.

JACK WARRICK

TECH SPEC

BMW M235i XDRIVE GRAN COUPÉ

It will be a practical and sensible choice for some people but is undermined by other products within BMW's own line-up

Price £44,435
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1998cc, turbocharged, petrol
Power 296bhp at 5750rpm
Torque 295lb ft at 2000rpm
Gearbox 7-spd automatic, 4WD
Kerb weight 1575kg
0-62mph 4.9sec
Top speed 155mph
Economy 37.7mpg
CO₂, tax band 170g/km, 37%
Rivals Audi S3 Sportback, Mercedes-AMG CLA 35

UK VERDICTS



TESTER'S NOTE

The WLTP test formula's fuel economy numbers almost always turn out to be optimistic, but the Terramar I tested surpassed its official lower-end figure, returning 42.9mpg over our 75-mile, mixed-roads route. **JW**



TESTED 18.2.25, HERTFORDSHIRE DELIVERIES NOW

CUPRA TERRAMAR

Does Tiguan's sportier sibling make any sense in its least sporty form?

Cupra's line-up has been transformed over the past year, with the Tavascan electric SUV being launched and the Leon and Formentor getting comprehensive overhauls – and now the Terramar arrives as the brand's final ICE car before it goes EV-only in 2030.

Unlike the slant-roofed Tavascan, the Terramar is a traditionally shaped SUV. It's essentially a sportier take on the Volkswagen Tiguan. There's no electric version, with the engine line-up consisting of familiar petrol and plug-in hybrid powertrains.

For Car of the Year award testing last year, we drove the PHEV and higher-powered petrols. This is the first time we have been behind the wheel of the entry-level 1.5-litre petrol in the UK. It offers 148bhp and 48V mild-hybrid assistance that Cupra claims boosts both economy and off-the-line performance. Power is sent to the front wheels via a seven-speed dual-clutch automatic (DSG) transmission.

The electrified four-pot has just

enough poke for this application, enabling the Terramar to hit 0-62mph in 9.3sec. It sets off quietly from a standstill and effortlessly carries you through town, but push on at higher speeds and it starts to feel strained and lacking in muscle.

It's no help that the DSG is ponderous during upshifts, and you're left feeling the car could do with a little more torque in general.

However, most drivers will be satisfied with this Terramar's performance in mixed driving, even though it doesn't quite live up to Cupra's sporty brand image.

Sport mode does little if anything to enhance performance or engagement, and while there are paddles to change gears manually, the DSG too quickly reverts back to which gear it thinks is best.

The Terramar is more satisfactory in corners, with light and direct steering making it easy to place. We found the heavier PHEV suffered from mild understeer that was just a little too obvious, but there's no such issue here. It feels sharper and lighter and is enjoyable on a B-road.

Despite sitting on passive suspension our V2 test car also rode well on the motorway, though surface imperfections penetrated the cabin in town. Higher-spec VZ-badged variants are equipped with adaptive dampers as standard, which, in our experience, irons out bumps far more effectively.

Our test car was fitted with 19in alloy wheels, which give the ride quality a little extra robustness but not to the extent that things become unsettled. In general, the Terramar made light work of most road imperfections and comfortably tackled harsher potholes.

However, road noise is more present than in rivals that really make a virtue of their road manners, such as the Volvo XC40.

Interior space is good, with plenty of leg and head room front and rear, many storage areas and a 540-litre boot. That's well up on the 400 litres offered by the Terramar PHEV and identical to the BMW X1's capacity.

Prices for the Terramar start at £37,605, and it's well equipped as standard. Even the entry-level

model is fitted with LED headlights, automatic wipers, a 10.25in digital cockpit, a 12.9in touchscreen and a reversing camera.

V2 trim adds heated door mirrors, wraparound ambient lighting, high-beam assist, a head-up display and heated front seats for £40,175, which seems good but not exceptional value for money (the equivalent Kia Sportage 1.6T GDi GT-Line S is around £1000 cheaper).

The Terramar is a fine family SUV with decent practicality and a hint of handling dynamism, then, but it doesn't quite stand out from its rivals in what is a congested class.

With this 1.5 eTSI engine, it offers reasonable daily performance, but so does the Tiguan for a few grand less, while the XC40 feels more refined and upmarket.

JACK WARRICK

TECH SPEC

CUPRA TERRAMAR 1.5 eTSI V2

A solid family SUV that struggles to stand out despite its blend of roominess, tech and sharp handling

★★★★☆

Price £40,175

Engine 4 cyls in line, 1498cc, turbocharged, petrol, plus 48V ISG

Power 148bhp at 5000rpm

Torque 184lb ft at 1500rpm

Gearbox 7-spd dual-clutch automatic, FWD

Kerb weight 1638kg

0-62mph 9.3sec

Top speed 127mph

Economy 42.8-46.3mpg

CO₂ tax band 140g/km, 33%

Rivals BMW X1, Mercedes-Benz GLA



New touchscreen is slicker and easier to navigate than the old Cupra system



It handles but is not that much more fun than a Tiguan R-Line

TESTED 27.1.25, SURREY DELIVERIES NOW

MAZDA CX-60

Promises fix for clunky suspension

WE DON'T GET many diesel engines at all these days, never mind big six-cylinder ones like Mazda's 3.3-litre e-Skyactiv D. But Mazda has always been happy to steer its own course, and this engine is, as it has been since arriving in 2022, delightfully unstressed and languid.

You can also still get a petrol-engined plug-in hybrid CX-60, the powertrain options remaining unchanged for this mild update.

The problem with the CX-60 was always the suspension. Everything about this car spoke of an assured, easygoing experience, apart from the fidgety, intrusive ride comfort. So Mazda has addressed that with some tweaks including softer rear springs and firmer rear dampers.

There was never a problem with the interior, but there are a few material upgrades for this popular mid-range Homura model.

So, is the ride comfort now in keeping with the understated plushness of the rest of the CX-60 package? Well, it's improved but unfortunately still not ideal.

Our test car rode on standard 20in alloy wheels and Toyo Proxis Sport rubber, and while it calmed down nicely enough at higher speeds, the ride was still fairly reactive at slower speeds – especially on scruffy, patchwork town roads. The light patter never quite let up and bigger potholes and recessed drains could set the suspension jarring a bit.

Don't get me wrong: while the ride could certainly be better, it's no longer the deal-breaker that it may have been for some previously.

And as an overall prospect the CX-60 remains rather appealing, given the space, the lovely textures and finishes inside the cabin, the sensible infotainment system with a rotary controller... You could say it's the car for the discerning buyer who doesn't want huge touchscreens or



Cockpit cuts a dash, especially in white scheme

noticeable electrification and all that modern mumbo jumbo.

The CX-60 is modern, it's classy and its tech is good, but it's also reassuringly old-school. Yes, there are still better-riding large SUVs: the Skoda Kodiaq and Volvo XC60 both qualify in that category. There are also cheaper ones, although Mazda's PCP finance and lease offers tend to be much more compelling than its list prices.

Overall, then, the CX-60 remains a slightly tricky one to justify. But get the right deal and it's a very charming option in an often charmless class.

VICKY PARROTT

TECH SPEC

MAZDA CX-60 3.3 E-SKYACTIV D 254 AWD HOMURA PLUS

Improved ride comfort isn't enough to make the CX-60 a more justifiable buy, even if it remains a lovably charming, left-field option

★★★★☆

Price £54,830

Engine 6 cyls in line, 3283cc,

turbocharged, diesel, plus ISG

Power 250bhp at 3750rpm

Torque 406lb ft at 1500-2400rpm

Gearbox 8-spd automatic, 4WD

Kerb weight 2001kg

0-62mph 7.4sec

Top speed 136mph

Economy 53.3mpg

CO₂ tax band 142g/km, 33%

Rivals Audi Q5 2.0 TDI, BMW X3 xDrive20d



TESTED 20.1.25, WILTSHIRE DELIVERIES NOW

KGM TORRES AWD

Family 4x4 with pure-petrol power

IN A CROWDED family SUV market featuring such cars as the Nissan Qashqai and Dacia Duster, the KGM Torres is a niche choice – and this new four-wheel-drive version fills a niche within that niche. But with the Korean brand registered as a small-volume manufacturer in the UK, offering models with a very specific appeal is likely to be a route to success.

A brief recap on the Torres: it's a new SUV built on KGM's newest platform, although its development predated the KG Group purchasing Ssangyong. It's powered by a 1.5-litre four-cylinder turbo petrol engine producing 161bhp through a six-speed automatic gearbox.

The new 4WD version uses the same engine and the same gearbox, offering the same 0-62mph time of a slightly ponderous 10.8sec; the only difference is the addition of a driveshaft to the rear axle. This is an active 4WD system, meaning it can select the best mode based on conditions, or be locked in 2WD or 4WD mode.

In everyday motoring, you won't discern much difference in driving dynamics. The engine is certainly perky, but it doesn't feel fully synched to the gearbox, while the ride remains a bit wobbly and can clunk over bigger bumps.

But for the sort of semi-off-road

use that you can imagine buyers of a slightly rugged alternative SUV will have in mind, this system would hold some appeal, with the promise of a touch of extra sure-footedness on slippery surfaces.

That said, it's worth considering if you will really need it, because the 4WD system hits the Torres's already disappointing fuel economy. The official figure is 31.1mpg, but on our test run it languished in the mid-20s.

The Torres AWD is offered only in top-spec K40 trim, so it comes with lots of kit, and the interior at least feels different from that of many identikit SUVs.

The AWD system doesn't rob the car of any of its space, so there's plenty of room for passengers and a massive 703-litre boot.

That isn't enough to make the Torres AWD a class leader, though, especially when several more conventional rivals are cheaper. But I can see it appealing to a certain type of buyer – and it's a niche that KGM is happy to fill.

JAMES ATTWOOD

TECH SPEC

KGM TORRES 1.5 GDI AWD K40

AWD drivetrain adds appeal to this mildly charismatic SUV, but there are better options for most buyers

★★★★☆

Price £36,995

Engine 4 cyls in line, 1497cc, turbo, petrol

Power 161bhp at 5000-5502rpm

Torque 207lb ft at 1500-4002rpm

Gearbox 6-spd automatic, 4WD

Kerb weight 2170kg

0-62mph 10.8sec

Top speed 118mph

Economy 31.1mpg

CO₂ tax band 207g/km, 37%

Rivals Dacia Duster TCe 130 4x4, Mazda CX-5 2.5 AWD, Subaru Forester e-Boxer



Cabin is let down by scratchy plastics and buggy touchscreen



ROAD TESTS



AUTOCAR ROAD TEST 5729

XPENG G6

New Chinese EV majors on space, tech, charging speed and value

MODEL TESTED XPENG G6 RWD STANDARD RANGE

Price £39,990

Power 255bhp

Torque 325lb ft

0-60mph 6.8sec

30-70mph 6.2sec

Top speed 124mph (claimed)

Average economy 3.2mpkWh

Weighted average

charging rate 147kW

CO₂ emissions 0g/km

70-0mph 53.9m (8deg C, damp)

It probably won't surprise you that the creator of the car pictured here, the Xpeng G6, is something of a Far Eastern imitator of Tesla. The brand has yet to assume anything like a comparable growth path but its expansion to European markets – including, very recently, the UK – may well be another key step along the way.

Xpeng was founded in Guangzhou, China, in 2014 by former senior executives of state-owned GAC. The enthusiasm for advanced automotive technology that those two executives, Xia Heng and He Tao, put at the core of their new enterprise can be read as a reaction against the presumably conservative attitudes of their former employer.

Xpeng had US offices in Silicon Valley, California, within a few short years of its formation and was closely involved in the development of autonomous cars before its fifth birthday. It is international in its outlook and independently operated – its shares are traded on the New York and Hong Kong stock exchanges – and it remains committed to distinguishing its electric cars from their peers primarily via their technology.

It introduced the G6 in China in June 2023 as “an ultra-smart coupé SUV” and it's now available through newly recruited UK distributors International Motors. Based on an all-new model platform, the G6 offers several key selling points relative to rivals grouped around a price point starting at just under £40,000. These include 800V rapid charging and, according to its maker, efficiency, on-board digital technology and sophisticated advanced driver assistance systems.

DESIGN & ENGINEERING

★★★★☆

PROS Lots of car for the money; doesn't skimp on power; standard- and long-range models offered

CONS Ought to be lighter; looks a bit like a Tesla cabaret tribute artiste

The G6 looks like a slightly naive mix of the progressive and derivative. Its ‘robot face’ look is clearly intended to outwardly manifest the technologically avant-garde philosophy within but just how successfully it manages to do that seems very open to question.

The curving roofline and distinctive silhouette are certainly quite bold and ought to better identify the car. And yet, overall, it's hard to see much of anything



Beta concept led to Xpeng's first car, G3

here but a mix of design cues appropriated from Tesla and Mercedes-Benz. The G6 looks a little like some strange, aggregated automotive form designed by AI.

The G6's engineering would certainly seem to deserve better. The car sits on Xpeng's SEPA2.0 platform, which is made up of a mixed-metal chassis of aluminium and steel, reinforced by a stressed underfloor battery pack. It has an aluminium body, an 800V electric architecture, with a silicon-carbide power inverter, and what Xpeng calls its ‘full scenario’ XPilot 2.5 driver assistance technology package, which is made up of a network of 29 cameras, radar transceivers and ultrasonic sensors, whose output is monitored and processed by a special Nvidia processor. If that sounds like a lot for an electric family SUV priced from under £40,000, it may be because, frankly, it is.

The car is available in the UK in single-motor, rear-wheel-drive form only (a dual-motor version is offered elsewhere) and in Standard Range and Long Range models. The latter uses a nickel-manganese-cobalt battery with 84kWh of usable capacity, the former a lithium-iron-phosphate (LFP) one of 65kWh. Both versions are driven by a permanent magnet-style electric motor with 325lb ft of peak torque, although in the Long Range model that motor develops marginally more peak power (282bhp) than in the Standard Range model (255bhp) that we elected to test.

So does the LFP battery and all that aluminium in the construction make this a relatively light EV? A little disappointingly, no. The G6 came in at 2067kg on the proving ground scales – heavier than the long-range Tesla Model Y we tested in 2022 and the Hyundai Ioniq 5 we tested the year after, both rivals with larger-capacity battery packs.

INTERIOR

★★★★☆

PROS Spacious in both rows; decent fit and finish for the money

CONS Dashboard is short on physical secondary controls; visibility could be better

The G6 feels a bit bathtub-like to sit in, the plunging bonnet and bodysides hidden from view from the driver's seat behind quite a high beltline and scuttle. This, combined with the effect of that descending roofline at the rear, makes for quite an enveloping ambience, which it builds on to modestly luxurious effect in at least one respect.

At 4.75m in length, this is quite a big car for the price – almost 200mm longer than a Peugeot e-3008 and more than 100mm longer than a Skoda Enyaq – and, more than anywhere, it feels that way in the provision of second-row passenger space. Even taller adults will find room to stretch



■ Curving roofline, which peaks just above the driver's head, gives the G6 a fairly unusual profile. It's a relatively tall car but the dark-coloured sills hide that quite well.



■ Xpeng calls this the G6's ‘robot face’, with its narrow horizontal light bar and, below it, separate headlights (whose auto-dipping functionality leaves quite a lot to be desired).

out in the back seats, which don't seem to suffer from the ‘high floor syndrome’ that affects many EVs. They also recline quite a long way.

Digital technology aside, though, you wouldn't say the G6's interior feels particularly lavish, though neither is it hard or cheaply kitted out. The perceived quality is a cut above that of MG and on a par with BYD and it certainly bears comparison with European brands.

Up front, there's a slightly anonymous look to the dashboard and primary controls, but that's mostly because there are so few features to look at here – and what is there isn't very originally themed.

The use of satin chrome switchgear and decorative trim against the charcoal grey of mouldings and cloth puts you in mind of a mid-level Mercedes business saloon, while the layout of a dominant central touchscreen, and so little elsewhere, is clearly from the Tesla playbook.

Unlike in a Tesla, the G6 does have an instrument display, but no head-up display, and it does have a ‘column shifter’ drive selector and an indicator stalk. The ‘thumb’ button consoles on the steering wheel spokes, meanwhile, double up to adjust the door mirror positioning and motorised steering column, in a similar way to a Tesla, once the right touchscreen menu is selected.

There's quite a bit of cabin ►

1 There was quite a lot of dark grey leather in our test car, but go for a Long Range model and you can have off-white leather on the seats, consoles and steering wheel instead.

2 Twin, cooled, 50W wireless device-charging pads leave your phone right in your peripheral vision, where an incoming alert might tempt you to pick it up, but they work very well.

3 There's a deep storage cubby within the armrest and more storage space under the floating console, although the G6 doesn't have a conventional glovebox.



WHEEL AND PEDAL ALIGNMENT A Steering offset 0mm B Brake offset 0mm C Accelerator offset 140mm right. The central positioning of the brake pedal can make it more comfortable to left-foot brake, once you're used to it. The driving position is otherwise sound.

◀ storage in the front row, between a deep armrest cubby and the space below the floating centre console. However, while the boot is advertised at a voluminous-sounding 571 litres, its outright space is clearly shallower than in some squarer-bodied SUV rivals, and might not be suited to carrying the very bulkiest of loads.

MULTIMEDIA

★★★★☆

PROS Good fitted navigation system; air-cooled wireless smartphone charging for two devices at a time

CONS Screen layout isn't properly converted for right-hand drive; no cursor controller; not enough physical secondary controls

The G6's 15in landscape-oriented touchscreen has very little back-up from permanent physical controls. As a result, like so many we have criticised, it must provide heater and ventilation controls, audio system controls, trip computer information, and more – all at a fairly distantly stretched arm's length from the driver.

Its first transgression is in not flipping its main vertical menu nav bar over to the right-hand margin of the screen for right-hand-drive users, which means you have to stretch all the way to the left when jumping around menus. That the lower shortcut nav bar makes the icons on it a little too small for easy at-a-glance identification is a more minor annoyance.

The system includes wireless smartphone mirroring for Apple and Android devices as standard. The twin, air-conditioning-cooled, 50W wireless smartphone charging pads are really great, too, and they work perfectly to keep your device topped up. But there's no shortcut to easily switch between the native and phone-mirroring software, which makes for another protracted dive through several screens every time – something there's a little too much of in any case.

PERFORMANCE

★★★★☆

PROS Quick enough; easy to drive
CONS No regen paddles; annoying pedestrian safety noises; a drop in performance at low charge

The G6's performance level is more than sufficient for daily driving and as linear and straightforward as any electric rival's. It's clearly a car designed to make life as easy, comfortable and safe as possible for you but with little regard for how much you might enjoy driving it. There's no pretence of dynamism or sportiness of the sort that Tesla typically, but not exclusively, trades in among specialist EV makers.

You're given plenty of choices to customise the driving experience via the central touchscreen and among them is the low-speed 'proximity noise' that it makes. The options are several but all sound suspiciously video-game-like and, regrettably, 'off' isn't an option.

The car has enough potency to feel brisk from low speeds and to get single-carriageway driving done fairly authoritatively when it needs to. The 50-80mph motorway overtaking dash takes a few tenths longer than in some rivals and, moreover, there's considerably more deterioration in the car's performance at less than 10% state of charge than we have seen elsewhere. (The G6's 0-60mph

dropped off by more than four seconds, whereas a Kia EV6's tails off by only four-tenths.) But this could be a deliberate calibration characteristic of the car's, done to maximise remaining range, rather than any limitation of the battery.

The absence of paddles for manual control of regenerative braking counts a little against the car on drivability. As with so many things, there's a toggle for it on the touchscreen and, as with others, it's buried several menu layers deep from the home screen.

RIDE & HANDLING

★★★★☆

PROS No sporting pretence; comfortable enough

CONS Feels too soft out of town and sometimes wooden and firm at low speeds

The one aspect of the G6's character that Xpeng doesn't seem to have appropriated from a certain other maker of EVs is how it drives. Its performance is fairly unremarkable, as you have just read, and so is its ride and handling.

In terms of its ride frequency and

dynamic tuning, it feels medium-soft, with a fairly gentle gait out of town – a little like a middle-sized, mid-range Volvo or Volkswagen. You can adjust the weight in the car's steering, though the directness of the fairly large tiller is always medium-slow, in line with the car's quite lengthy wheelbase, and a sense of filtered disconnection from the front wheels is ever-present. So the G6 isn't very agile and we found that a lighter control weight suited it better and made it feel at least more coherent.

However, soft certainly doesn't mean settled when it comes to the close body control and ride composure of the G6. Xpeng has chosen a multi-valve passive damper from Sachs, which behaves a little like a frequency-selective shock – albeit one apparently in need of some further fine-tuning.

The car's ride feels a little wooden, sharp and under-isolated over high-frequency bumps like deceleration ridges and drain covers, as if the suspension is freezing a little. Then it becomes too permissive over longer-wave ones, allowing the body to pitch and heave a little at speed, and undermining its cruising comfort. The lack of effective support for the body was particularly evident in our wet-weather emergency stops, when the car's mass rocked back and forwards between its axles, rather than managing to work both consistently and evenly, as the ABS kicked in.

The car controls lateral movement better and certainly wouldn't run out of grip or be short of stability on the road. At the limit of grip, you can begin to feel the influence of the rearwards weight distribution as the car pushes into roll-understeer. The ESC can be a little slow to quell the chassis when it first pitches into a throttle-off slide in wet conditions, but it does an effective job eventually.

ASSISTED DRIVING

★★★★★

PROS AEB seems sensitive to its surroundings; most systems stay off when deactivated

CONS Flaky lane keeping system; automatic headlights dazzle preceding traffic

The G6's assisted driving technology is advertised as one of its key selling points so ought to be a real strong suit for it, but our testers weren't particularly impressed.

The lane departure warning system defaults to on at every ignition cycle, but the speed limit warning buzzer doesn't and neither does the driver monitoring system, which is odd, in light of the framing of European legislation on these things – though we would certainly prefer it that way.

The lane keeping system is tied to the adaptive cruise control. The latter works fairly smoothly but the

former struggles with inconsistent lane markings and drops in and out with annoying frequency anywhere other than on perfectly marked motorway.

The active-dipping headlights must use the same cameras and image processors as the various other ADAS functions – and even they struggle to spot cars that you are following beyond a fairly close distance and all too often switch to full beam when they shouldn't.

However, we have no criticisms of the autonomous emergency braking system, which, through the instrumentation screen, seemed to have a very complete picture of any potential hazards in its immediate surroundings during our test and never triggered unnecessarily.

BUYING & OWNING

★★★★★

PROS Convincing metal-for-money value; fast-charging; fairly efficient
CONS Personal finance deal terms have yet to be confirmed

The G6 is available from just under £40,000. That gives the Standard Range car a price advantage of £5000 over the outgoing, bottom-rung version of the Tesla Model Y (the equivalent facelifted Model Y hasn't been announced yet) and a similar one over a Kia EV6 and Peugeot e-3008, although cars like the Skoda Enyaq are closer prospects.

At the time of writing, Xpeng UK hadn't finalised its personal finance offerings, so we're unsure of its exact cost on a monthly basis, though residual value forecasts are certainly in line with rivals. One way or another, there should be little denying the value that this car represents in terms of sheer metal and equipment for the money.

On electric range, charging speed and associated longer-range usability, the car impressed equally well. Our Standard Range test car bettered 3mpkWh on both an average and touring test basis. That's better than a Kia EV6 or Hyundai Ioniq 5 managed when last we tested either and matches the Tesla Model Y Long Range we tested in 2022. It suggests this car could cover 215 UK motorway miles between charges (when tested in fairly chilly conditions too, remember). We would expect the bigger-battery G6 to give well beyond 250 real-world miles, for under £45k. Not quite transformative or class-leading efficiency perhaps, but still very good for the price.

The G6's rapid-charging speed peaked at just under 200kW at a very low state of charge, but a strong rate was maintained up to 70%, giving an impressive weighted average of 147kW (Kia EV6 125kW, Polestar 2 Long Range Single Motor 124kW). The G6 Long Range has an even faster claimed peak charging speed (215kW versus 280kW), which our test car's performance gives us good reason to believe. ►



FRONT Leg room 1080mm, head room 1050mm. Front seats are comfortable but they don't quite adjust every which way.



REAR Leg room 820mm, head room 970mm. Second row reclines manually quite a long way and offers a fair bit more leg room than a Polestar 2.



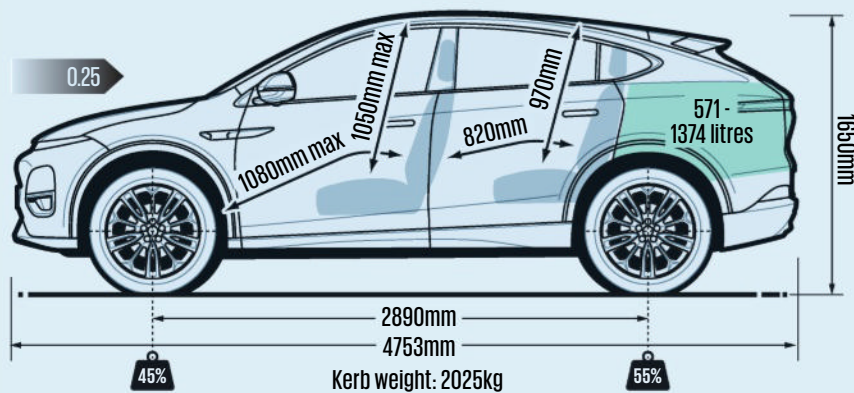
BOOT Length 950–1850mm, width 1050–1160mm, height 420–670mm. Boot is a little shallow at its rearmost edge. It's still quite large, though.



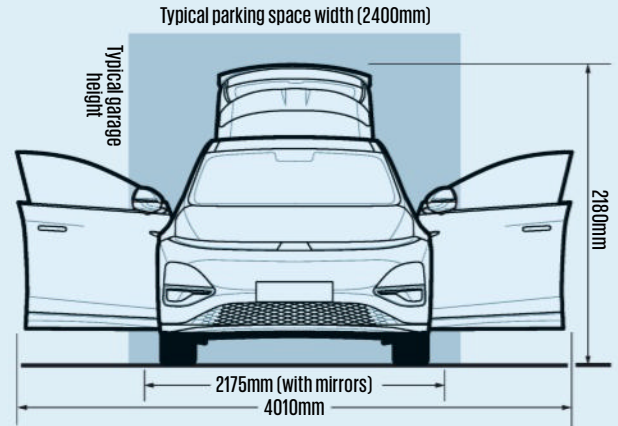
"It has enough potency to feel brisk from low speeds"

TEST RESULTS

DIMENSIONS



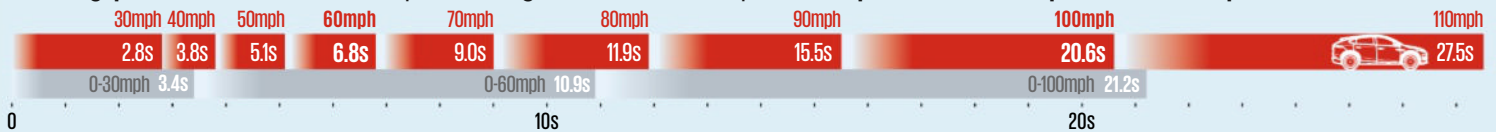
PARKING



ACCELERATION

Test conditions 8deg C, damp

Standing quarter mile 15.5sec at 90.0mph Standing km 28.6sec at 111.2mph 30-70mph 6.2sec 50-80mph 6.8sec 0-62mph 7.1sec



Cupra Tavascan 82kWh V1 (2025, 9deg C, dry)

Standing quarter mile 14.6sec at 98.4mph Standing km 26.8sec at 114.4mph 30-70mph 5.0sec 50-80mph 5.0sec 0-62mph 6.3sec



BRAKING

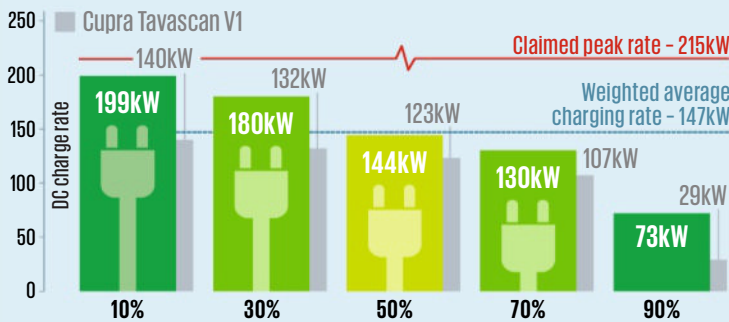
Dry 60-0mph 2.91sec



Wet 60-0mph 3.06sec

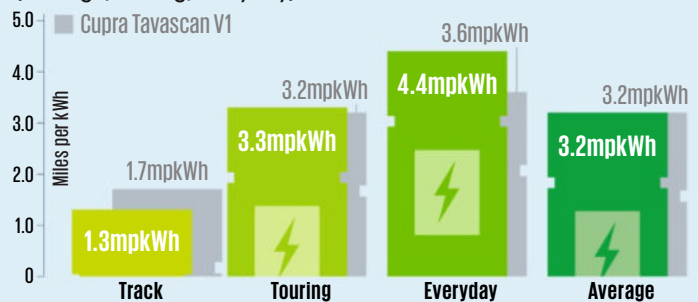


RAPID-CHARGING PERFORMANCE

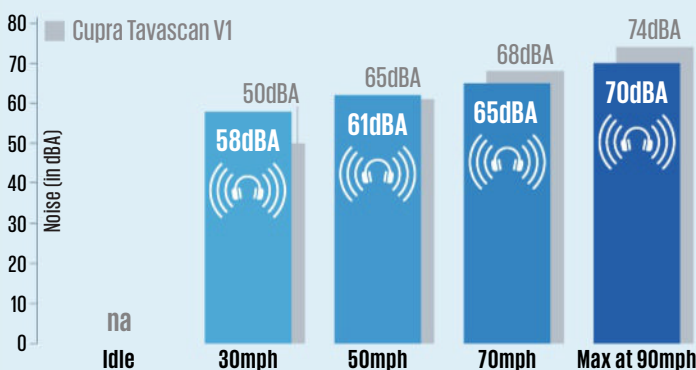


RUNNING EFFICIENCY

WLTP 270 miles, 3.6mpkWh (combined) Test range 208/215/286 miles (average/touring/everyday)

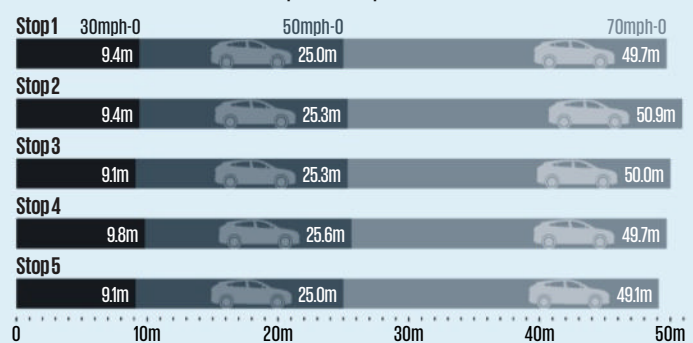


CABIN NOISE



BRAKING ENDURANCE

Fade variance 70-0m - stop 1 vs stop 5: -0.6m



THE SMALL PRINT Power-to-weight and torque-to-weight figures are calculated using manufacturer's claimed kerb weight. © 2025, Haymarket Media Group Ltd. Test results may not be reproduced without editor's written permission. For information on the G6, contact Xpeng Customer Services, IM Group, The Gate, International Drive, Solihull, West Midlands, B90 4WA (0121 747 4000, xpengcars.co.uk).

MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATION

XPENG G6 RWD STANDARD RANGE

On-the-road price £39,990

Price as tested £40,890

Value after 3yrs/36k miles £18,275

Contract hire na

PCP finance na

FITTED EQUIPMENT

Standard 15in touchscreen multimedia system, 10.2in digital dashboard, panoramic glass roof, 20in alloy wheels, electric tailgate, heated and ventilated front seats, heated rear seats, 18-speaker surround audio
Optional Metallic paint (Fiery Orange) £900

MOTOR & BATTERY

Installation Rear, transverse, RWD
Type Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 255bhp
Torque 325lb ft
Maximum regen capacity na
Battery type LFP
Capacity 66.0/65.3kWh (total/usable)
Voltage 800V
Power to weight 126bhp per tonne
Torque to weight 160lb ft per tonne

GEARBOX

Type 1-spd reduction gear
Reduction ratio na
mph per 1000rpm na
Motor rpm at 70/80mph na

CHASSIS & BODY

Construction Steel and aluminium monocoque, aluminium body
Weight/as tested 2025kg/2067kg
Weight distribution (f/r) 45%/55%
Drag coefficient 0.25
Wheels 8.0Jx20in
Tyres 255/45 R20 105W, Michelin Pilot Sport EV
Spare None (mobility foam)

SUSPENSION & STEERING

Front Double wishbones, coil springs, anti-roll bar
Rear Multi-link, coil springs, anti-roll bar
Steering EPAS, rack and pinion; 2.8 turns lock to lock; na turning circle

BRAKES

Front Ventilated discs, size unspecified
Rear Ventilated discs, size unspecified
Handbrake type Electronic, automatic

SAFETY

Euro NCAP rating 5 stars (2024)
 Adult occupant 88%, child occupant 85%, vulnerable road users 81%, safety assist 81%

EMISSIONS & TAX

CO₂ 0g/km
BIK at 20/40% pcm £13/£27

VERDICT

Lacks inspiration but has plenty of rational appeal



The first time you see an Xpeng G6 on UK roads, you may need two or three takes to recognise it. Visually, it's anonymous and derivative and serves to prove that when Chinese designers seek to make a class-leading car, they tend to copy the best that's on the market, rather than to surpass it.

However, to dismiss this car out of hand as a second-rate Tesla tribute act would be to overlook some clear and fairly convincing rational qualities. The G6 is spacious, quite versatile, comfortable, fairly well appointed, efficient, fast-charging and, above all else, strong value for money.

To drive, it's quite ordinary – and at times a little poorly resolved. But if the digitally dominated operating concept doesn't irritate you, and the design doesn't either, there are good, sensible reasons to consider it.

TESTERS' NOTES



ILLYA VERPRAET

By folding down its seats, the G6 can convert itself into a bed for up to two people, with the addition of an airbed accessory. It will also play lullaby sounds as you drop off and keep the climate control running while you snooze.



MATT SAUNDERS

Our test car was slightly anomalous, since its Fiery Orange paint will only be offered on most UK cars with the Long Range version. The other colours are disappointingly sombre, mind: white, black, grey or silver.

FACELIFT FIXES

- Work on the damper tuning.
- Reskin the multimedia menus for RHD navigation, and to switch in and out of CarPlay more easily.
- Add a proper resettable trip computer.

RANKING RIVALS



RENAULT SCENIC E-TECH LONG RANGE
 A size smaller than the G6 but well packaged and slick to drive, with distinguishing range.

★★★★☆

Price £40,995
Power, torque 215bhp, 221lb ft
0-62mph, top speed 7.9sec, 106mph
Range, economy 379 miles, 3.6mpkWh



TESLA MODEL Y RWD
 Pre-facelift Model Ys can still be ordered – and are competitive to boot. Pricier than a G6, mind, especially after options.

★★★★☆

Price £44,935
Power, torque 342bhp, na
0-62mph, top speed 6.6sec, 135mph
Range, economy 283 miles, 4.0mpkWh



KIA EV6 84KWH AIR
 Along with the Tesla, the cheapest EV6 shows where the G6's natural price point should be. Roomy, but sportier with it.

★★★★☆

Price £45,520
Power, torque 225bhp, 258lb ft
0-62mph, top speed 7.7sec, 115mph
Range, economy 361 miles, 3.9mpkWh



VAUXHALL GRANDLAND GS
 New Vauxhall offers a lot more space than the related Peugeot e-3008, and far lower prices.

★★★★☆

Price £38,440
Power, torque 211bhp, 254lb ft
0-62mph, top speed 9.0sec, 106mph
Range, economy 323 miles, 3.7mpkWh



SKODA ENYAQ 60 SEL
 Typically higher-rated – but not in short-range, entry-grade form, which is all G6 money buys.

★★★★☆

Price £38,335
Power, torque 201bhp, 229lb ft
0-62mph, top speed 8.1sec, 99mph
Range, economy 268 miles, 4.0mpkWh



AUTOCAR ROAD TEST 5730

MASERATI GRANTURISMO

Maserati enters EV era with 750bhp coupé – but is there enough drama?

What a difference a new model generation can make, eh? The previous Maserati Granturismo, with its 4.7-litre naturally aspirated V8, was one of the rortiest-sounding cars in existence. Indeed, were an owner to fire up their sleek Italian GT on a cold start round the back of Harrods, the more keen-eared pedestrians outside South Kensington tube would just be able to make out the engine's rip-roaring gargle. Superb.

But now the V8 has been retired on emissions grounds. The latest Granturismo, which looks similar to the old one but is more or less entirely new, now carries a 3.0-litre V6, but the platform has been

engineered also to facilitate a purely electric set-up. The Granturismo has thus gone from having one of the most extroverted sonic signatures in the car world to having almost none at all.

We're nonetheless keen to road test the Granturismo Folgore, as the electric version is known. As we will soon discover, Maserati's approach to building a super-EV is different from what already exists. There's also no shortage of speed and this car is unusually easy on the eye.

Might a clinical, refined and hugely effective electric powertrain in some ways actually suit the urbane Granturismo rather well? Time to find out what the first electric Maserati is like in the UK.

DESIGN & ENGINEERING

★★★★☆

PROS Still has those show-stopping looks; retains ICE car's hip point

CONS Higher CoG than rivals; also heavier than claimed on our scales

All variants, petrol or electric, are made at Maserati's Modena plant and are also equipped with four-wheel drive – another first for the Granturismo. Purists might not like that, but in the case of the Folgore, a driven front axle seems sensible in light of an output north of 750bhp.

Were you to strip away the sleek bodywork, you would find three 402bhp electric motors from Marelli's plant in Bari, Italy, with two of them on the rear axle.

They spin to 17,600rpm and give the Folgore an installed power output of 1206bhp, but because of the limitations of the NMC battery pack, 'only' 751bhp can be generated at any given moment. The motors are notable in using Formula E-derived silicon-carbide inverters, which are lighter and have a greater power density than traditional silicon inverters.

The car's 92.5kWh, 800V battery, which is made at the Mirafiori battery hub in Turin, doesn't follow convention in being spread out flat along the floorpan. Instead, it is shaped to fill the space that, in ICE Granturismos, would be occupied by the engine, gearbox and propshaft, with a cruciform just

MODEL TESTED MASERATI GRANTURISMO FOLGORE

Price £178,330

Power 751bhp

Torque 996lb ft

0-60mph 2.9sec

30-70mph 2.3sec

Top speed 202mph (claimed)

Average economy 2.2mpkWh

Weighted average

charging rate 202kW

CO₂ emissions 0g/km

70-0mph 48.4m (7deg C,
damp/drying)

1 Folgore still gets the same epic, tactile paddles as the petrol car but, instead of gears, here they can be used to rapidly alter the strength of the regen braking.

2 Like Porsche and AMG, Maserati hangs its drive mode selector from the wheel. Rotating it takes you from Max Range through to Corsa. Hit the centre to change the damping.

3 Gear selector buttons feel a little low-rent in a cabin that is otherwise nicely realised in terms of both design and build quality. The steering rim is a firm delight.



WHEEL AND PEDAL ALIGNMENT A Steering offset 0mm B Brake offset 70mm right C Accelerator offset 180mm right. Neat right-hand-drive set-up, with no awkward offsets. Hip point is also commendably low.

It's also worth noting that the Porsche Taycan Turbo S we tested recently weighed 2356kg, versus a claimed 2295kg. Despite their differing door counts, the Porsche and the Maserati are remarkably similarly sized cars, so it's reasonable to compare them. Strident, multi-motor performance EVs remain very heavy in general.

Aside from its electric driveline and some structural strengthening to the boot floor, around the front subframe and to the central tunnel, the Folgore is identical to the petrol versions. Suspension is by double wishbones at the front and a multi-link arrangement at the back, and the car is reasonably rare in being a two-door sporting coupé (albeit it an unusually large one) that rides on air springs. Electronically controlled dampers complete the set-up, and the wheel and tyre package is as per the ICE cars.

INTERIOR

★★★★☆

PROS Surprisingly spacious in the back; traditional charm abounds
CONS Some switchgear feels cheap

The Folgore's cabin is largely identical to that of the petrol car, so we won't repeat ourselves too much here. In short, there's a good mix of finishes and the general atmosphere is suitably opulent and relaxing. The Folgore is also notable for having a fine driving position, aided by the

fact that there is no battery capacity directly underneath the front seats.

With the generous wheelbase, the back seats are also usable if not for larger adults over longer journeys then certainly for short stints and teenagers. Less impressive is boot space, which at 270 litres trails that of the Taycan by some margin.

EV-specific elements are limited to the vast aluminium paddles, which no longer change gear but vary the level of regenerative braking (an appreciable 400kW and 0.65g is available) on the fly, and the sharp graphics inside the 12.3in central touchscreen and the 12.2in digital instrument binnacle. There is some latency in the software and the menu structure takes some getting used to, but Android Auto and Apple CarPlay are standard and work mostly seamlessly.

PERFORMANCE

★★★★★

PROS Enormous pace; linear delivery; mostly excellent traction
CONS Lack of V8 soul; somewhat muted brake-pedal feel

With a dedicated electric motor for each of the rear wheels (they are entirely decoupled), the Folgore needs no limited-slip differential. The delivery of power and torque is instead determined by Maserati's proprietary Vehicle Domain Control Module controller. How much go you get, and applied to which ►



■ Wheel/tyre package is the same as the ICE car's. Does the heavier, more powerful Folgore need extra rubber? Not in our view. Note also that for cruising, it reverts to front-wheel drive.



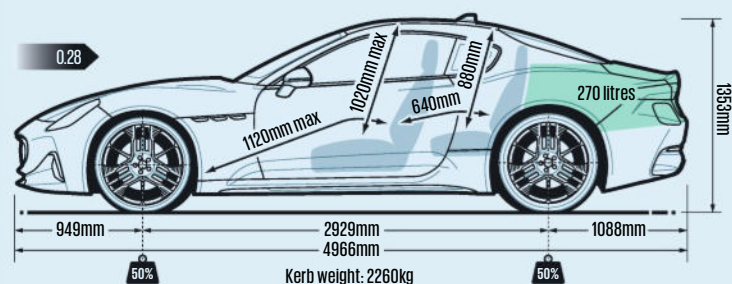
■ Trio of vents on the flank are an age-old Maserati hallmark (an idea originally borrowed from Buick). The Folgore doesn't need them but still has them. They're also backlit.

ahead of the rear axle. So the car's centre of gravity is higher than it could be, though Maserati claims that this centralised glut of battery capacity puts the mass closer to the car's roll axis. It uses pouch-style modules and can be DC fast-charged at speeds of up to 270kW. The pack weighs 600kg.

Unsurprisingly, the Granturismo is hardly a light and dainty car, and it continues a recent trend of road test Maseratis weighing notably more than claimed. The Folgore's official figure is 2260kg, some 465kg more than that of the V6-engined Granturismo Trofeo. However, on our scales, the electric car came in at 2358kg, albeit with a perfectly even weight distribution.

TEST RESULTS

DIMENSIONS



RUNNING EFFICIENCY

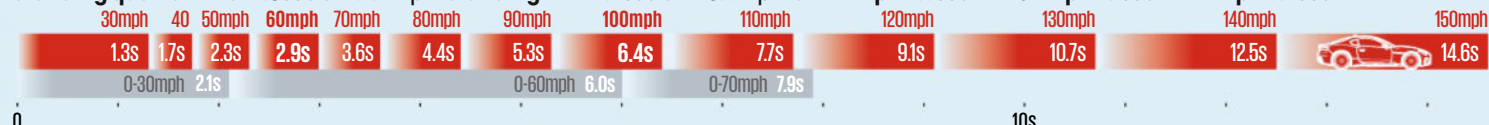
WLTP 269–282 miles, 2.7–2.8mpkWh (combined)
Test range 183/191/241 miles (average/touring/everyday)



ACCELERATION

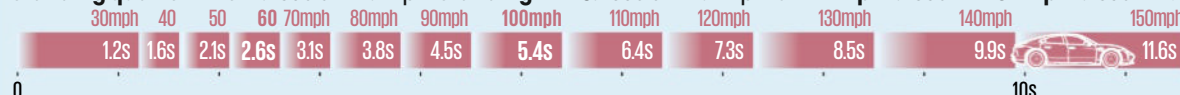
Test conditions 7deg C, damp/drying

Standing quarter mile 10.8sec at 131.0mph Standing km 20.2sec at 168.3mph 30–70mph 2.3sec 50–80mph 2.1sec 0–62mph 3.0sec



Porsche Taycan Turbo S (2024, 11deg C, drying)

Standing quarter mile 10.2sec at 141.1mph Standing km 18.6sec at 161.0mph 30–70mph 1.9sec 50–80mph 1.7sec 0–62mph 2.7sec

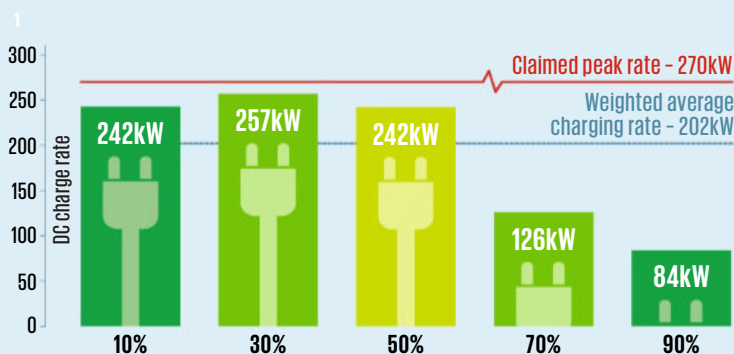


BRAKING

Dry 60–0mph 2.63sec



RAPID-CHARGING PERFORMANCE



MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATION

MASERATI GRANTURISMO FOLGORE

On-the-road price £178,330
Price as tested £195,430
Value after 3yrs/36k miles £86,600
Insurance group 50

MOTORS AND BATTERY

Installation Transverse, front and rear, four-wheel drive
Type Three permanent magnet synchronous motors (two rear, one front)
Power 751bhp
Torque 996lb ft
Battery 92.5/83.0kWh (total/usable), nickel manganese cobalt, 800V
Power to weight 332bhp per tonne
Torque to weight 441lb ft per tonne

GEARBOX

Type 1-spdr reduction gear
mph per 1000rpm 11.6

CHASSIS & BODY

Construction Steel and aluminium monocoque
Weight/as tested 2260kg/2358kg
Wheels 9.5Jx20in (f), 10.5Jx21in (r)
Tyres 265/35 ZR20 (f), 295/30 ZR21 (r), Goodyear Eagle F1 Supersport

SUSPENSION & STEERING

Front Double wishbones, air springs, adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar
Rear Multi-link, air springs, adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar
Steering EPAS, rack and pinion; 2.4 turns lock to lock; 12.4m turning circle



"There is muscle car character here but also plenty of polish"



PETER LIDDIARD

◀ axle/wheel, also depends on the drive mode you're in. Choices range from Max Range, through the default GT, into Sport and then finally Corsa. Only in Sport and Corsa are you given access to all 751bhp and 996lb ft (in GT mode, you're limited to 80% of those figures) and it is in these modes that the chassis also hunkers down.

It almost goes without saying that the Folgore is quick enough to stunt your speech and turn your stomach. Even in damp/drying conditions at the Horiba MIRA proving ground, it gets off the line cleanly and, as with the Taycan Turbo S we tested, there is evidently some very considered tuning of the ESP/traction control systems underpinning it all.

The Porsche's ability to skim forward just beyond the tyres' limit of adhesion but still with colossal thrust is perhaps a touch more finessed than the Maserati's, but both cars are amazingly adept at putting power down. In suboptimal conditions, the Folgore hit 60mph in 2.9sec, 100mph in 6.4sec and 150mph in 14.6sec. The V6 Granturismo Trofeo, on dry Tarmac, needed 3.6sec, 8.0sec and 18.7sec respectively. It is left for dead by its new electric sibling.

More subjectively, the Folgore is straightforward to rub along with in normal use. Even in Corsa mode, the initial flow of power and torque is deftly managed and never painfully sharp, with acceleration unfolding rapidly but predictably.

Moreover, while the chassis will happily get a bit of a gratifying slither on if it's damp underwheel and you're deliberately heavy-footed, it always seems to feel controllable, with the front axle quick – but not too quick – to straighten you out. There's some muscle car character here, but also plenty of polish. Again, the underlying electronics seem to be expertly calibrated.

Stopping power is good in the context of a 2.3-tonne car, and the ability to use the paddles to vary the potentially very powerful extent of the regen effect is a genuinely involving element of the Folgore experience. There's also rather a seamless handover between motor-elicited and proper, physical braking, but the pedal feel itself is simply too numb in general. The Taycan is more convincing here.

RIDE & HANDLING

★★★★☆

PROS Composure on UK roads; good blend of stability and throttle-adjustability

CONS Understeer balance blunts driver appeal; always feels heavy

The Granturismo finds itself in a somewhat awkward middle ground when it comes to ride and handling. It's an impressively cohesive character, with a level of response and accuracy that's alien to the previous generation, yet it still isn't

quite sharp enough to be termed a 'driver's car'. Simultaneously, it is passably serene and refined on the move, but it lacks that final level of isolation that would put it in about the same realm as the old Mercedes S-Class coupé. It feels like Maserati should have gone one way or the other, rather than trying, and not quite managing, to do both.

Nonetheless, the Folgore is enjoyable company and quite unusual in its dynamic flavour. Almost all performance EVs have the same fundamental feeling: very low centre of gravity and an ultra-direct but also hefty nature to direction changes.

With its ICE-esque distribution of mass, the Granturismo Folgore is different. It rolls and heaves and generally flows like a traditional GT, and we rather like that. It has an

insouciance that the Taycan lacks.

Combine this with the fine driving position, an excellent helm and the smart integration of torque vectoring (both on power and coast) and you have the makings of a competent and satisfying GT car. What ends up holding the Folgore back is its sheer mass and the notable understeer balance on anything less than a committed 'throttle'. How much of the latter is unavoidable given the layout, and how much is intentional, for stability purposes, is difficult to discern.

In terms of comfort and isolation, the Granturismo Folgore has a fine long-wave gait but is often too reactive on poor surfaces. It also recorded 71dBA at 70mph, which is notably louder than the 66dBA of the Taycan Turbo S.



VERDICT

Assured and likeable but could only ever be bought with the heart – even sans V8

★★★★☆

Platforms designed for ICE and EV applications too often yield underwhelming results in both cases but the latest Granturismo bucks this trend. The V6s are more convincing than ever as super-GTs and now the Folgore shows it too can be fast and thrilling one moment but also uniquely calm and collected the next. It is rather a likeable machine, despite lacking the overt sonic charm of Granturismos of yesteryear and carrying around with it nearly 2.4 tonnes. Alas, the recipe feels like a work in progress. Greater range and efficiency is needed. A little less dynamic compromise too.

BUYING & OWNING

★★★★☆

PROS A fabulous statement car for the Riviera; charges fairly quickly
CONS Expensive; so-so efficiency and range; likely to soon feel dated

The coupé starts at £178k, with the cabriolet adding £6k. A Taycan Turbo S – faster, better to use daily and just more complete – starts at £161k. In addition, a £180k EV with a real-world UK motorway range of less than 200 miles clearly isn't good enough, especially one with grand touring associations.

But look at it another way. The next least expensive two-door performance EV is the Pininfarina Battista, which is £2.4 million and arguably not as pretty. The Granturismo Folgore is also here now, unlike Tesla's Mk2 Roadster. **A**

RIVALS



PORSCHE TAYCAN TURBO S
From £161,400
★★★★☆



AUDI R8 E-TRON GT
From £127,310
★★★★☆



TESLA ROADSTER
From £200,000 (est)

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MATT SAUNDERS

Testing, testing



Never mind whacking up the heating, this is the best way to drain an EV's battery

There's one part of the process we currently go through when benchmarking a new car for a road test that, while necessary, isn't formally part of it at all. And yet it's very often one of the more revealing things we do, although I'm not sure how to regularise it or, for that matter, if we can practically take meaningful test data from it at all.

Inevitably, it's something specific to electric cars, the test procedures for which it feels like the duty of this generation of road testers to coin and assimilate. Our performance benchmarking of EVs starts with a minimum 90% charge showing and, going via acceleration tests, braking tests, handling tests and everything else, typically concludes with between 45% and 65% SoC (that's 'state of charge') left. At that point, two key performance tests

"There's probably a smarter solution, but we simply spank it"

remain: the measurement of 'charge depleted' acceleration at less than 10% SoC and DC rapid-charge testing, taken from a similar level.

So what's the quickest way to turn an EV with more than half of its charge still 'in the tank' into one running on 'electron fumes'? Well, there's probably a smarter, more technical solution (although I would be surprised if you could do it in a minute at the roadside), but if you're an Autocar road tester, you follow your instincts and simply spank it.

My preferred method is to use the Horiba MIRA proving ground's 'number one' circuit. It's four lanes wide, nearly three miles around and has three banked corners. In the outside lane, you can be cornering at 33deg from the horizontal, at a 'neutral' steering speed (the one at which the car would steer itself around the bend) of 86mph. Set the cruise control to 90mph, then, and just let about 30 to 45 minutes fly by the window: that will usually do it. What I tend to do, however, saves some time. It's an abuse test, I suppose. Sitting in lane four, I go through the heart of each bend at about 90mph, then accelerate hard up to 130mph along each straight (or as close to that as I can get), braking hard enough at each straight's end to shed most of the car's speed using the friction brakes.

This is not only a very efficient way of burning through charge but also must be about the most intensive thing you can do to a battery-electric powertrain, heating the battery up to such an extent as to sternly test its cooling. Nothing has caught fire yet. The good thing about travelling at 100mph in a big circle is that cool air is never hard to come by.

In any case, most EVs will, at some point in the process, automatically cap motor output in order to bring the battery temperature down, and I've known one or two to enter a limp mode – or simply coast to a halt – until the heat subsides.

Weirdly, very few will actually tell you why they're struggling. The Mk1 Nissan Leaf (and indeed the Mk2) had an instrument showing its battery temperature, which would inexorably climb if you covered longer motorway journeys punctuated by rapid-charging stops. Not many current EVs bother to, however. And while very few will often be driven in the way of an Autocar road tester but once in their otherwise dull and uneventful lives, I still say the gauge would be worth having.

The other thing worth having, if only for the likes of us, would be an 'empty battery to 10% SoC immediately' button. I mean, these days it wouldn't be an actual button, sadly, and no owner in their right mind would want to press it anyway, either deliberately or by accident (in my mind, it's definitely marked with the 'A' of the Autocar masthead). But I might press it, if short of time on a testing day – even if, once in a while, it meant missing out on 130mph in lane four.



Why do so few EVs offer drivers this information?

Game for a laugh

Zero-emissions motoring doesn't have to be boring, but which of the latest fun-to-drive EVs gets our road testers' vote? Let the judging begin

PHOTOGRAPHY MAX EDLESTON

**ALFA ROMEO JUNIOR
ELETTRICA VELOCE**
SPEC HIGHLIGHTS £42,295,
278bhp, 254lb ft, 1590kg,
6.0sec, 124mph, 200 miles

ALPINE A290 GTS
SPEC HIGHLIGHTS £37,500,
215bhp, 221lb ft, 1479kg,
6.4sec, 105mph, 224 miles

MINI COOPER SE SPORT
SPEC HIGHLIGHTS £37,420,
215bhp, 243lb ft, 1680kg,
6.7sec, 106mph, 247 miles

It's 18 months since we first collected a field of affordable electric cars together along with a similar number of Autocar road testers. The aim was to perform some proper back-to-back testing and decide if any – or perhaps how many – of the former could be considered genuinely good fun to drive.

Back in 2023, then out of a field of six cars, we found several that were enjoyable to drive, but only one or two of those felt like they existed primarily for the purpose of driver entertainment. Our winner then was a car that would go on to scoop other Autocar group test honours and, in revised form, is likely to set a stiff pace even for this one: the Cupra Born.

Now look how the electric car landscape has changed. Over the past 12 months alone, the market for affordable electric cars really has burst into bloom. Leading powers in the mainstream EV market, names such as

Hyundai, Kia and Volkswagen, have launched new EV performance sub-brands, while the likes of Alfa Romeo, Abarth, Ford and Alpine are showing that the 'legacy brands' can also cater to enthusiasts' tastes with their zero-emissions offerings.

This second running of Autocar's Best Fun EV test takes in no fewer than three special performance derivatives of both new and well-established compact electric cars. The hotly anticipated and all-new Alpine A290 – tested in top-of-the-line GTS form – is foremost among them, but alongside it is Alfa Romeo's first EV, the Junior Elettrica Veloce, as well as Cupra's performance-tuned Born, the VZ.

The second-generation electric Mini, the Cooper SE, should give those cars a stern test for energetic driver appeal, while the MG 4 – a car that has been rated by our testers among the best-handling affordable EVs since its first appearance in 2022 – rounds out our line-up, appearing here in Extended Range trim.

Read on, then, to discover the most entertaining way to spend sensible money on a new electric car in 2025. ►

MG 4 EV EXTENDED RANGE TROPHY

SPEC HIGHLIGHTS £36,495, 242bhp, 258lb ft, 1748kg, 6.1sec, 112mph, 323 miles

CUPRA BORN VZ
SPEC HIGHLIGHTS £44,625, 322bhp, 402lb ft, 1924kg, 5.6sec, 124mph, 366 miles



MG 4 EV

This is a classic tale of a fine car damned by high expectations. I say this of it, from the depths of last place in this test, because I feel a touch hurt for the MG 4. Why? Well, it's really rather good. If you were looking for a well-priced electric family car with a decent range, useful practicality and a long warranty, this would be on your shortlist. And you would hop in it at the dealership, drive it up the road and think 'Hang on... I'm enjoying myself! The steering is nice, the nose turns in sweetly. I can even feel a fizz of rear-wheel-drive playfulness in faster corners. Joy of joys; my sensible, affordable family car is fun!'

This, dear reader, is precisely what I thought when I first drove the MG 4. It's still what I think, and it's what the Autocar road testers thought, as you may have seen from the healthy four-star 'ride and handling' and overall rating that it was awarded. And it's why we included the MG in this test, knowing that it was a great choice for someone who wanted a sensible electric

car but also valued a bit of zing thrown into the performance and handling mix.

Yet even in its excellent Extended Range guise, the MG 4 came fifth. Not because it isn't fun within the context of the electric hatchback classes, but because it isn't fun within the context of fun electric cars – those models that have 'being fun' much closer to the top of their to-do list. Flamboyance, style, driver involvement, that intangible sense of naughtiness and rebelliousness... You know. All of that.

That's why I also ranked the MG 4 last (awkward...) despite it being a car that I'd recommend for lots of reasons. But this isn't a family EV test, is it? It's a fun EV test. And the MG 4 is a family EV that is, incidentally, quite good fun. It's not a fun EV that you can, incidentally, also fit your family in. Crucial difference there, but one that scuppers the MG's chances in a field of more extrovert, enthusiast-targeted offerings.

VICKY PARROTT



MG 4 has a decent range and delivers practicality in spades

TESTER'S NOTE

This was my second drive in Alfa's hot Junior EV. It seemed a little happier on the roads of the Peak District than it did around Silverstone's local rural road network back in December. It felt keen and direct and moderately quick, but its handling is scruffy, it's short on traction and its body control is excitable. A disappointingly cheap-feeling cabin too. Alfa can and must do better than this – and soon.



MATT SAUNDERS



MG entertains in its own right but falls short on overall engagement

MG 4 EV EXTENDED RANGE TROPHY

A great family EV that's also quite fun to drive. But in this company, being incidentally good to drive isn't good enough

★★★★☆

Price £36,495

Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor

Power 242bhp

Torque 258lb ft

Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, RWD

Kerb weight 1748kg

0-62mph 6.1sec

Top speed 112mph

Battery 77.0/74.4kWh (total/usable)

Range, economy 323 miles, 3.7mpkWh

ALFA ROMEO JUNIOR ELETTRICA VELOCE

The makings of a fun driver's car minus the execution: Stellantis platform undermines its claims to be a true Alfa

★★★★☆

Price £42,295

Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor

Power 278bhp

Torque 254lb ft

Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, FWD

Kerb weight 1590kg

0-62mph 6.0sec

Top speed 124mph

Battery 54.0/50.8kWh (total/usable)

Range, economy 200 miles, 4.1mpkWh



4TH
PLACE

Alfa Romeo Junior Elettrica

The Alfa Romeo Junior Elettrica Veloce's spec sheet makes for a promising read. Here is a compact hot hatch with 278bhp and a proper mechanical limited-slip differential to make sure as much of that power can reach the road. The front brake discs are a healthy 380mm in diameter and they're gripped by four-piston calipers. And you get to sit in some comfortably figure-hugging Sabelt bucket seats. On hardware alone, the Alfa should walk this competition.

But as you can tell by reading about this car so early into this feature, it doesn't. The trouble is that Alfa hadn't finished the job.

There's no doubt that the Junior Veloce is more than quick enough, and in the cold, greasy conditions of our test, it clearly found the best traction out of tight corners. Put your foot down out of a hairpin in the other front-wheel-drive cars and, despite their best traction control trickery, they would want to power understeer, while the Alfa's diff did its best to hug the apex.

It's an uneven performer, however. The Alfa is very surface-sensitive and would get more deflected than others over bumps. Its steering

has neither the Mini's alacrity nor the polish you will find in the Alpine and the rear-drive cars.

Mostly, though, the Alfa suffers from having to share with its Stellantis brothers and sisters. Whereas the Mini and Alpine's cabins feel bespoke and upmarket, the Alfa can't hide its Jeep Avenger door cards, hard plastic dash and long-arm, short-leg driving position.

And while the best electric driver's cars are exploring new frontiers of how traction and stability control can enhance the experience, the Alfa is saddled with the same restrictive and non-switchable system as all its platform-mates. The differential has the ability to pull the car out of a corner very effectively with a bit of wheelspin, and the chassis clearly wants to rotate on a trailing 'throttle', but the computer says 'no' as soon as you're starting to have too much fun.

The people who will appreciate the benefits of this hardware will surely be frustrated by the Alfa's limitations. Never mind that it's expensive, the Alfa feels at odds with itself. There's fun to be had here, but don't get carried away.

ILLYA VERPRAET



Traction is good in wet conditions but poor surfaces break the spell



Parts-bin cabin makes do with cheap materials



Mini Cooper SE

There's no shame in coming third, especially given the level of competition here. And with such a heritage of accessible handling prowess, a short wheelbase, a low centre of gravity and a healthy 215bhp, it's no surprise the Mini Cooper SE made the podium. It even came dressed for the occasion, with its John Cooper Works styling kit.

At 1680kg, it's the third-lightest car here too, and it feels as such to drive: the Mini is all on-its-toes, especially next to the larger, heavier MG. The steering is sharp, reactive and quite well weighted, it tucks in to corners keenly and grips with a tenacity that encourages you to lean on it. What's more, the minimal body roll means it's well suited to tight, technical roads: the Mini handles like a car you drive because you choose to, not because you have to.

Of the selectable drive modes, two are important here: Core and Go Kart. Each changes the throttle and steering mapping, along with the stability control regime. Go Kart weights up the steering and makes for more immediate, energetic cornering behaviour, while Core – the default setting – makes the handling more intuitive. The Cooper SE has got this whole

happy-go-lucky excitable puppy vibe that explains why every judge rated it highly both for charm and overall fun factor.

No matter which setting you choose, however, the ride isn't perfect. It can fidget around on surfaces that aren't glass-smooth, and while it's far from harsh or unpleasant, most judges felt the quality of Mini's damping could be better.

The levels of performance on offer are just about competitive with the group. Its 0-62mph time of 6.7sec makes the Mini 0.3sec slower than the Alpine and 0.7sec behind the Alfa; the fastest car in the group – the Born VZ – is more than a second quicker. Having said that, the Cooper SE's relatively low kerb weight and equally low driving position make it seem faster than the on-paper figures suggest.

Under power, however, the (slightly overworked) traction control attempts to keep the scrabbling tyres in check. As you build speed, meanwhile, torque steer briefly ensues and the steering becomes a little wayward – particularly if you're heading uphill. Generally, the Alpine and Cupra deploy their power better, which, among a couple of judges, dents the Mini's score

for performance and handling appeal.

If you're not trying to flummox it around corners, however, the Mini remains planted and assured as it should, and the brakes are strong but not overly grabby. The pedal could be more progressive, however, especially in the company of the Alpine, but with maximum regen switched on, you don't have to use them all of the time.

In isolation, the Mini's usable range is good enough, and it didn't deplete as quickly as we might have expected during a bout of winter road testing: 247 miles is more like 190 miles in everyday driving. But the Mini's maximum charging speed of 95kW is the slowest here. This, combined with a small boot and the fact that it's a strict four-seater, meant most judges marked the Mini down for everyday usability.

Those issues aside, however, it's easy to see the appeal of a Mini and understand why owners are so drawn to the cars. When you're not trying too hard, it's a keen-handling performer that possesses enough depth of character and charm to beat every car here, even those that finished above it. It's almost there, but not quite.

JONATHAN BRYCE

MINI COOPER SE SPORT

Trademark handling poise and cutesy looks, but there are cars out there with better usability and body control

★★★★☆

Price £37,420

Engine Separately excited synchronous motor

Power 215bhp

Torque 243lb ft

Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, FWD

Kerb weight 1680kg

0-62mph 6.7sec

Top speed 106mph

Battery 54.2/49.2kWh (total/usable)

Range, economy 247 miles, 4.1mpkWh



TESTER'S NOTE

I love the Mini's ultra-eager demeanour, scrabbling away, tugging at the steering and lift-off oversteering at will. The Alpine is the more polished driver's car, but in the same way that I prefer a Lamborghini over a McLaren, I'd take the Mini out of this lot. It's also the only three-door, and I'm quite keen on that dying breed.

ILLYA VERPRAET



It fidgets and the ride is harsh, but the Mini is always fun to drive



Practicality isn't a strong point, but the appeal is undimmed



John Cooper Works styling kit hints at the Mini's potential



Mini's latest take on the Union flag flirts with the abstract

THE USED ALTERNATIVES



MINI ELECTRIC

Typical used example

2022, 6500 miles, £10,000

If you can't stomach the £30k price of a new one, this first-generation Mini Electric gives you just as much driver involvement for one-third of the price. It is essentially a standard Mini Cooper with a 28.9kWh (usable capacity) battery pack slung under the rear passenger seat, giving a lab test range of 144 miles. But because the whole car only weighs 1365kg, it's plenty engaging and energetic, with levels of grip and agility that would rival even its modern equivalent.



HONDA E

Typical used example

2021, 18,000 miles, £14,000

If you can live with the piffling, 130-mile claimed battery range, this little Honda is a pleasure to both drive and own. With a rear-wheel-drive chassis that provides smooth, intuitive steering, along with a pliant ride and great visibility, the E is ideal if you're in the market for a stylish but affordable EV with a bit of pep. And it's not like you're getting something cheaply finished: Honda benchmarked the E against larger, D-segment models of the period.



RENAULT ZOE

Typical used example

2014, 38,000 miles, £4000

This was once the UK's best-selling EV, and it's easy to see why. It may not be as engaging as the Alpine A290, but the Zoe is one of Autocar's favourite electric cars because of its simplicity and practicality, and it is really appealing to drive. It's light, nimble and agile, and body roll is tightly controlled. It's quite telling when Steve Cropley wants to ask a company CEO if a car can be brought back from the grave, but that's what happened when he lived with one of these. Vive la Zoe!

2ND
PLACE

Cupra Born VZ



Low-key looks don't shout about the Cupra Born's abilities

I was pondering the Cupra Born VZ while gazing at it in our car park near the melancholically scenic and gnarly 'Broken Road' – once the A625 to Chapel-en-le-Frith, until Mam Tor shrugged it off and it became a hiking-only route instead.

The thing is, one of the big criticisms of the VZ is that it looks much like every other Cupra Born. Sure, you can get some bespoke colours, and it's badged-up. But even so, how will people know you've bought the one with all the power and handling upgrades? The one with 322bhp, the 'good' motor from the VW ID 7, the upgraded suspension hardware and adaptive dampers... I mean, the VZ (which stands for 'Veloz', or 'fast', in Spanish) is proper. It is to the Born what the GTI is to the Golf, and when you're behind the wheel and in the right mode, it gives you all the feels to make sure you don't forget it. But where are the design cues to set it apart? It's like buying a GTI that looks the same as any old Golf.

But then... Isn't that something we used to value in performance cars? The 'Q-car' appeal? This led me to Google 'best Q-cars', upon which I found a 2017 Autocar article ranking the top 10. Andrew Frankel placed the 'E28' BMW M5 as king of the Q-cars. Forgive me for quoting him, here: "To me... its visual ordinariness lies at the heart of its appeal."

As usual, Frankel summed things up perfectly. The parallels between the legendary '80s M5 (which, by the way, had usefully less power than the VZ overall, yet it predictably managed a 200bhp-per-tonne rating better than the Cupra's 167bhp per tonne) end there, but the sentiment applies just as well: why do even the mundane cars of today have to come adorned with sports chintz and frippery to spare? Sheep in wolves' clothing, if you ask me...

So, personally, I like the Cupra for its clever trick of looking both understated and modestly aggressive and purposeful. It strikes a nice balance of being desirable without being shouty, while the sense of occasion you get from behind the wheel is just what you want. The Sabelt seats hug you reassuringly, the slim steering wheel feels delicate and lets feedback buzz your fingertips and the rear-wheel-drive layout lets you turn and balance the car on the throttle. The Cupra is a proper laugh out on the Peak District's winding roads, yet it's also unintimidating and versatile. The adaptive dampers let you play with the softness levels of the suspension independently, or I favour the pre-determined, full-fat Cupra mode for when the going gets fun,

and Normal for, well, the normal stuff.

Would I like the screen to be a bit less convoluted? Absolutely. Is this the most expensive car here? Yes – unfortunately, this breadth of ability and usability doesn't come cheap. And when we were asked to score these cars on charm, well, that's such a subjective thing, but I found the Cupra lacking on that one. It's so capable. So appealing. But is it charming? Not really. Not in my book, anyway. Maybe we're back to the styling again, which I like, but it is very modern and striking rather than having any retro-nostalgia or classic beauty. The Cupra feels like it's designed to do its job, and while it does it seriously well, I'm not sure it's evocative or emotional. I would be entirely understanding if you claimed otherwise, but such is the way of trying to rate something as intangible and personal as 'charm'. I like a granary loaf, you like a crusty white. I think the Mini and Alpine are charming, but the Cupra? Not so much. Different tastes apply, and therein lies the real joy of cars and those who love them.

But if we return to more objective measures, the VZ is hard to beat. For a long-way-home car that you can actually get your kids in and which has a useful touring range, a decent boot and a settled ride, this is the best car here. Sure, the most fun car here won, as it should do, and bravo to this year's champ. But as an overall fun car to live with? You're looking at the best. Clever stuff, Cupra. And thank you for giving us a wolf in sheep's clothing. Makes a refreshing change.

VICKY PARROTT

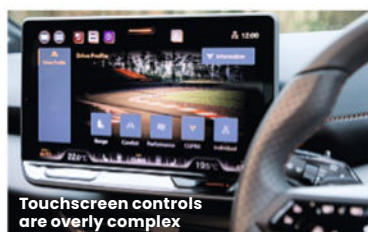


Good balance and great feedback help make the most of rear-drive layout

TESTER'S NOTE

Usability remains the Born's superpower in this company. I'd love an Alpine A290 – but I reckon I could use a Born a fair bit more easily. So even if I got less out of each individual drive, I might still end up having more fun in the Born in a sum-total accounting type of way. It does feel relatively big and heavy compared with the Mini and Alpine, but it's still a great compromise if you need true five-door space.

MATT SAUNDERS



Touchscreen controls are overly complex



Modern styling is free of retro references



Firmly cossetting Sabelt seats in the Born's inviting cabin

CUPRA BORN VZ

A tough act to beat for outright pace, range and usability, even if its handling shows some evidence of weight

★★★★☆

Price £44,625

Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor

Power 322bhp

Torque 402lb ft

Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, RWD

Kerb weight 1924kg

0-62mph 5.6sec

Top speed 124mph

Battery 84/79kWh (total/usable)

Range, economy 366 miles, 4.1mpkWh

TESTER'S NOTES

It's easy to tell that the Alpine's front brakes use the same calipers as the A110. They're strong but not overpowering, there's a fantastic amount of pedal feel and they blend themselves neatly with the regen system. Having said that, at much lower speeds they can have slightly too much bite.

JONATHAN BRYCE



**1st
PLACE**

Alpine A290

Shock, horror, who'd have thunk it? The bookies' favourite romps to the top of our final order, overcoming the weight of expectation and delivering a decisive and authoritative victory and a new benchmark for driver reward. Right?

Well, no, funnily enough. At least not quite. Success for the Alpine A290 didn't come so easily over a day's close scrutiny on proper UK roads – although it came sure enough. It wasn't a walkover, and the car needed every facet of its appeal as a device for driver entertainment, a retro-cool object of desire and a daily-usable proposition to seal the deal. But the Alpine A290 is indeed Autocar's Best Fun EV for 2025.

There was some dissent and disagreement about the car's outright dynamic superiority, but in the end, the numbers just about added up in the Alpine's favour. Only two jurors out of four gave more points to the A290 than to any rival; the other two preferred the Mini Cooper SE, and one of those was by no small margin.

But in the end it was completeness and consistency – or, rather, the want of it in other places – that gave the Alpine the win. The judges scored the cars out of 10 across five categories – performance, handling appeal, everyday usability, charm, and all-round fun factor – and



Well-finished cabin adds to the A290's overall appeal

ALPINE A290 GTS

Expertly executed 'just right' compromise of size, weight, power and price feels special to drive more of the time

★★★★★

Price £37,500

Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor

Power 215bhp

Torque 221lb ft

Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, FWD

Kerb weight 1479kg

0-62mph 6.4sec

Top speed 105mph

Battery 55/52kWh (total/usable)

Range, economy 224 miles, 3.7mpkWh



Alpine feels firm in town but is composed and rewarding on a B-road

TESTER'S NOTES

There are no cupholders in the A290; they've gone in favour of gear selector buttons like those in the A110. I'm besotted with the A110. But I'm also besotted with coffee. So I'd like cupholders, please.

VICKY PARROTT



while its rivals recorded fours, fives and sixes in places, only in a couple of isolated cases did the A290 score less than seven for anything.

This, then, may be the ideal size, price, weight and performance level for a dynamic-handling, compact electric car in 2025; it's the bullseye compromise, as near, at any rate, as it may currently be hit. And doesn't it make perfect sense that those old hot hatchback experts in France best understand how to absolutely nail it?

Besides its Goldilocks positioning, however, what does the A290 have that its competitors lack? Relative to the Mini (which really might as well be a sports car for how usable it is), you could say five doors and a halfway-spacious boot. Relative to the MG and Alfa Romeo, both the cohesive charm of the A290's design and the variety, richness and material appeal of its cabin really shine (the Alfa Romeo in particular is conspicuously disappointing on both scores).

But compared with all of its gathered opponents, it was the depth and integrity of the A290's performance engineering that really distinguished it amid the Derbyshire peaks.

Those specially developed and tuned, hydraulically bushed, all-independent axles confer a slightly firm-feeling ride at town speeds. But that smooths out to become a really sophisticated degree of B-road composure at speed, one that never feels grabby or tetchy and always keeps the car from feeling cumbersome or heavy. There's a pervasive and ever-present sense of composed fluency about the Alpine, over crests and through fast corners, that makes it feel special to drive when rivals aren't.

Unlike the Mini, there's no sense of

hyperactivity about the A290 when you really get it moving. It's a car that inspires loads of confidence and which feels properly sorted, intuitive and on your side, but it's one that can still mix it with the Mini for outright alertness and agility when the moment comes.

The A290's compactness is a decisive factor in making it a natural entertainer when changing direction, but a really tactile steering rack and a secure but suggestible sort of front-drive handling balance also play their part. There's too much outright grip and composure here to turn the A290 into some kind of 2020s-era, all-electric tribute to the French hot hatchback greats of the 1980s and 1990s. You have to work quite hard to make it begin to lift-off oversteer, for example, but the A290's chassis really does know how to come to life on a trailing throttle in any case – and all the more so still when its battery regen toggle has been turned up.

I could live without the cheesy 'OV' push-to-pass button on the steering wheel – you don't need to press it in any case once your right foot has passed the accelerator's kickdown switch. And I would have preferred brake regen paddles to a toggle knob, not to mention other routes, perhaps, to trimming and tweaking the power delivery and keeping you engaged in doling out performance by means other than your big toe.

The Hyundai Ioniq 5 N shows the difference such efforts can make. But equally, the simplicity, compactness, lightness, purpose and sophistication of the Alpine A290 are all strengths in their own right, and they add up to a car that's fully worth the hype.

MATT SAUNDERS

Judges' scores

	SAUNDERS	VERPRAET	PARROTT	BRYCE	GRAND TOTAL
Alpine A290 GTS	42	35	41	40	158
Cupra Born VZ	40	37	39	37	153
Mini Cooper SE Sport	36	42	32	41	151
Alfa Junior Elettrica Veloce	30	29	30	31	120
MG 4 EV Extended Range	34	30	27	28	119



Tactile steering enhances the engagement



A290's looks hark back to golden era of French hot hatches

Alpine A290 vs Mika Meon

EV twist on the beach buggy takes driving purity to the extreme

Who brought a crossbow to this laser-powered gunfight? Before we get overexcited about the future of driver's cars being saved, let's take a step back. The Alpine, the lightest and, as it turns out, best car here, still weighs nearly 1.5 tonnes – for something that counts as supermini. What if you could have an electric driver's car that weighs less than half that?

The Alpine's steering, as good as it is, is still influenced by a couple of motors (one for the power steering and one doing the driving) having their say before any feel reaches the driver's fingertips. What if you could just do away with all that? Why not send the drive to the rear and do away with power steering?

And while SUVs are mercifully absent from this contest, none of our mass-produced saviours can completely banish the 'covered wagon' feel of

sitting on top of, rather than in, the car. After all, you are still sitting on top of a battery pack. What if you could have a proper driving position?

Well, you can, even if those kinds of old-school driver's car values come with a few compromises. If nothing else, though, the Mika Meon is a fascinating thought experiment.

The Mika Meon is the brainchild of chassis engineer Robin Hall (who has some fine-handling cars on his CV). It aims to demonstrate both how well an EV can drive when it's rid of all that weight and how good a beach buggy can be when it's rid of its Beetle ancestry.

There isn't the space here to cover all of the technical details, so I refer you to road test editor Matt Saunders' earlier first drive (Autocar, 18 September 2024); in short, don't be fooled by the beach buggy looks; this is a completely custom-built chassis, with the 20kWh of Nio batteries



TESTER'S NOTE

The Meon's BYD-sourced electric motor produces an agricultural whine under acceleration that makes the driving experience all the more visceral. While 229lb ft feels more like 400lb ft in a car that weighs so little, its scream is what tricks you into thinking you're going quickly.

JONATHAN BRYCE



positioned down the spine forming an integral part of the structure. A 215bhp motor sits at the back and there are no driver aids – not even ABS – or power steering. It's an enticing prospect.

Clearly, no one is cross-shopping a Mika with any of our electric hatchbacks. Instead, it's here in the same capacity as Caterhams at our Britain's Best Driver's Car contest: to provide some interesting context and benchmarking.

Now, I can't deny that I have a few misgivings about the Meon that didn't bother Saunders when he drove it last summer. Not least is that during the single-digit temperatures of our photoshoot, my numbed fingers were much more of a limiting factor on driving range than the small battery capacity. I also struggled with the positioning of the pedals, the implementation of the brake regen and the absence of a limited-slip diff.

The steering is something to savour, though. At anything above parking speeds, it's lovely and light but transmits such delicately detailed messages about the loads going through the chassis that you always know exactly where you're at. Combine that with the impeccable

balance and the nicely pliant ride quality, and it means you can flow this car down a twisty road in a way that's alien to our group test hatchbacks.

In isolation, the Alpine's steering is great: it is precise, it lets you know when grip is about to run out, and it's less affected by torque steer than the Mini. But suddenly it feels rather fuzzy and corrupted, making you take a couple of stabs at a corner rather than scribing a neat line.

Something else modern performance cars can learn from is the sense of speed you get in the Mika. There's arguably a bit too much of it as your right ear is rapidly freeze-dried, but it's reassuring that you can attack a road with gusto, look down at the speedo thinking you might be going a bit too quickly and realise you're actually nowhere near the speed limit.

There's joy in driving a slow car fast, which is why I prefer our five hatchbacks over the 800bhp super-SUVs that manufacturers seem keen on pushing. But even these cars have enough performance and isolation to make them go unreasonably quickly without having to try too hard, and their makers would be wise to keep

everyday fun at the top of the agenda.

Comparing a 1479kg front-wheel-drive hatchback with a purpose-built sports car weighing half as much may seem like a cruel thing to do, but while there is still plenty of room for improvement in the current generation of electric cars, you could see that as a positive thing. It's something to look forward to as battery technology improves and hopefully continues to become lighter and more compact.

Just as traditional petrol-powered hot hatches are disappearing or becoming unaffordable (we're looking at you, £50,000 Civic Type R), there are some great options for electric cars with more than a dash of driver appeal. In the end, none is shown up by the weekend toy, and they're all daily-drivable with usable range.

Do they represent progress compared with a manual gearbox-equipped, naturally aspirated Clio RS200 from 2005? That's debatable, but the progress that affordable-ish driver's EVs have made in just three years is pretty spectacular. Things can only get better from here.

ILLYA VERPRAET



The Mika Meon steers and turns in a way the A290 can only dream of



Styling apes old beach buggy, but chassis is modern



Hypothermia limits range on a cold day, not battery capacity



Big central tunnel houses batteries; pedals are awkward

MIKA MEON

Shows that lightness, compactness and instant torque can combine brilliantly in a fun EV – albeit one that you wouldn't drive every day

★★★★☆

Price £75,000

Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor

Power 215bhp

Torque 229lb ft

Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, RWD

Kerb weight 675kg

0-62mph 3.5sec

Top speed 100mph

Battery 22/20kWh (total/usable)

Range, economy 100 miles (est),

5.0mpkWh (est)

State of the artisan

Italy's famous coachbuilders aren't worried about new technology and changing tastes. Quite the opposite, in fact, discovers **STEPHEN DOBIE**

"It could be the revival of coachbuilding," Andrea Zagato, CEO of the company bearing his surname, founded in 1919 by his grandfather, is confident. Confident that his specialist industry is fit and ready to not only survive the new automotive era but thrive in it: "The art of coachbuilding is 500 years old, while automotive is around 150. We've already survived all possible technological shifts. I joined the company in the middle of the crisis of the early '90s, when other coachbuilders were lost. We survived all of this. So why not a change of technology?"

While the romance of automotive coachbuilding was perhaps strongest in its early decades, it stands to win over new audiences a century later, due to two diverging strands: the move to EVs with vastly shared platforms (just look at Ford and Volkswagen buddying up) and the nostalgic response of restomods and their ilk. Whether on fully digitised or wantonly analogue bases, the need for individual designs and finely crafted bodies may be more crucial than ever.

"We are case designers," continues Zagato, "so we concentrate on what you see, what you touch. Whatever technology you provide us beneath, it's not a big change for us. There are several converging trends in the automotive industry, and one is the growing demand for exclusivity. There's also a standardisation of the components, even in internal combustion cars. Stellantis is a prime example: for me, the new Lancia Ypsilon is better-looking than the Peugeot 208, but they're almost the same underneath. The styling might be the deciding factor for buyers."

Zagato insists that his firm will embrace new technology, rather than fear it. He cites artificial intelligence and 3D stamping as beneficial for its small-scale projects, explaining: "You don't have to invest thousands of euros in moulds or tooling, because you can quickly build the parts to create one-off and few-off cars. We're already building many one-offs with 3D stamping."

"We're living through a technological challenge created by the war between EVs and ICE cars," he continues. "If electric motors win, the standardisation in the industry will

be maximised. I can see a time when you won't be keen to own a mass-production car; you will rent, use, share. Design may become the main element of differentiation.

"People are looking for uniqueness and personal expression. This is bringing us to the point that coachbuilding could be truly back soon. I believe restomods are an intermediate step."

This brings us to the £550,000-plus AGT'Z Twin Tail (a collaboration between Zagato and La Squadra, a Polish dealer of collector's cars), which clothes today's Alpine A110 in a dramatic

skin paying homage to the A220 endurance racer of the '60s. Two bodystyles are replicated by one car, thanks to an innovatively removable longtail.

Its modern core means it doesn't fit the true description of a restomod, says Zagato: "It's a typical coachbuilding job, using inspiration from the past and telling the iconic story of the A220. This is a modernisation of the concept. We have airbags and contemporary safety systems on board. We've integrated modern technology with timeless design. This is the difference between us and a restomod."

OLD AND NEW TOGETHER

Another Italian coachbuilder is making a successful business case for true restomods, though. Last summer, Carrozzeria Touring Superleggera unveiled its Veloce12, which takes an old Ferrari 550 Maranello and endows it with freshened engine, chassis and brake components beneath a reimagined body.

"We believe the market for high-end classic cars has seen a shift in buyers to a new generation of product," says CEO Markus Tellenbach. "Cars from the '50s or '60s struggle a bit with younger buyers, which is where cars from the '90s come into focus."

Many of the £600,000-plus Veloce12s have been sold to American buyers. Its status as a restomod is crucial there, as cars not originally approved for US sale can't legally be imported for unrestricted road use until they're 25 years old.

"Our concept fits the story of the '90s analogue car and using a donor means we don't have to do our own homologation," confirms Tellenbach.

The 30 buyers are split 50/50 between those supplying their own 550 Maranello donor car and those buying the car purely on sight at Monterey Car Week in California. "Our youngest customers are in their late thirties – younger than Touring's historic age," reveals Tellenbach. "Making a classic design contemporary and fresh resonates with a new audience."

It seems Touring has tapped into an elusive market frequently chased by mainstream car makers, often in vain.

"We aren't burdened by the rucksack of being consistent with brand values like an OEM," ►

"If EVs win, design may become the main element of differentiation"



New tech creates opportunities, says Zagato



AGTZ invokes an old car without actually being based on one



Panel-beating by hand now coexists with 3D stamping



Italian coachbuilders have long and proud histories



Velocel12 exemplifies '90s focus, says Tellenbach



“The market for high-end classic cars has seen a shift to a new generation”

◀ says Tellenbach. “For a big, established name, it’s tougher to respect all your usual rules and establish brand recognition while also appealing to younger buyers.”

Yet the Veloce12 isn’t Touring operating at its purest, he adds: “Making 30 cars in two years is quite an efficient programme for us, all thanks to carbonfibre. With hand-built aluminium, you can’t do that. We love making one-offs or few-offs where the panel-beaters create the car: that’s where our true heart lies. It’s what I want to revive and keep active as a true coachbuilding discipline. Something which fully reflects the craftsmanship that a collector appreciates.

“It’s more likely that we will find another way to reinterpret classic beauty than push the envelope on new construction materials. We aren’t scientists; we’re coachbuilders. If I find a friendly OEM with a 12-cylinder, front-engined car who will shake hands with us, you might see a brand-new Touring [rather than a restomod]. Maybe today that’s wishful thinking, but tomorrow, who knows? It’s only possible to have access to a brand-new platform when you’re working directly with the company in question.”

One such company is Alfa Romeo, whose historical relationship with Touring helped secure the coachbuilder its contract to build the limited-run 33 Stradale supercar.

“It has to be done in a co-operative way,” says Tellenbach. “We need a friendly relationship, similar to AMG with Mercedes or Alpina with BMW. That direction surely has a great future.”

The companies previously paired up for the gorgeous Disco Volante, a proper coachbuilt ‘case’ atop the 8C Competizione’s platform.

“That was designed by Touring and Alfa Romeo liked it so much they asked us to put their badge on it,” says Tellenbach. “Which is great if you like the story between the two brands, these neighbours in Milan, although it’s probably not typical. But we’re building the 33 Stradale with a team split almost 50/50 between the two brands. Our old friendship is revived.”

And what of the relationship between Touring and another of its famous neighbours, Pininfarina, the Veloce12 essentially being the former’s resketching of the latter’s work? “Some online comments insisted that the original lines shouldn’t be touched,” admits Tellenbach, “but there is no animosity. We have a professional respect for each other’s work. Their question over dinner at Monterey was: ‘Does it sell?’”

TAILORING AND TOP HATS

While Automobili Pininfarina is a branch away from the coachbuilding culture of old (as a sibling company of the original Pininfarina design house), its cars are still subject to the same fastidious buyers, as evidenced by the Battista Targamerica, which was also revealed at Monterey, then handed over to “one of our most important clients” by CEO Paolo Dellachà.

“It’s not what most of our customers want but a few of them,” he says. “They’re asking us if we can develop them something that isn’t just the usual colours, materials and finishing [CMF] bespoke process – they want to go a step further. To realise the first open-roof Battista,

Disco Volante shows what can be achieved when maker and coachbuilder work together



Dellachà is guiding the Pininfarina brand into new territory





WHAT COMES NEXT



The AGTZ Twin Tail may not be a restomod, but its maker respects analogue culture. We can expect a ground-up Zagato model within the next 12 months that's free of turbocharging and electronic assistance, says Andrea Zagato: "We want to prove it's possible to enjoy yourself on the track like in the 1950s and get all of those feelings without having to go top speed." Exciting...

Touring Superleggera, meanwhile, has more front-engine GT restomods in mind. "I wouldn't limit myself to just fish in the '90s pond," says Markus Tellenbach, "although Italian design and the gran turismo layout is something you will always see in Touring designs as long as I lead the company."

And Automobili Pininfarina will soon have a second model to sit below the £2 million-plus Battista, says Paolo Dellachà: "For our next vehicle, we're looking to increase volume – although with numbers in the hundreds, not thousands. It will still be in the ultra-luxury league, priced above €500k." It may be hybrid rather than electric, too.



Pininfarina is keen to make more one-offs like Targamerica

for instance. The Battista operates in a sphere where the residual value of the car is more bound to its level of exclusivity than its technology."

Does this represent a chance to return to the coachbuilding roots of Pininfarina that date back to 1930? "I will always be happy to create one-offs and few-offs spun from any of our main models," answers Dellachà. "Pininfarina has been doing this very extensively in the past. Of course you have to do it in proportion, in the right measure, to avoid becoming specialised only in that. You need to have a solid platform first. Once you have that, there's more freedom in terms of creating even more outstanding design."

One-offs aren't necessarily the big profit-booster they can be for more mainstream manufacturers' special vehicle divisions, however, says Dellachà: "They may cost more to the customer, but these unique cars require additional design, engineering and tooling. There's always a homologation process, even for the Targamerica. It's not just a show-and-display car [a way to bypass the US's 25-year rule]."

Dellachà joined Automobili Pininfarina in 2023, following lengthy stints at Ferrari and Maserati.

"Mostly at those brands, our custom products concerned CMF rather than 'top hat' [ie body and interior] modifications," he says. "Top hat is more of the Pininfarina tradition."

"Such coachbuilding is not limited by the technology of the powertrain. You can do it on ICE, hybrid or electric [bases], and the transformation can go from zero to 100 according to the level of bespoke a customer wants to achieve – and the level of money they wish to invest in the process."

"With a lot of patience and creativity, we can really thrill our buyer with something that's exciting at all possible levels – and that's purely working on design, without touching any of the performance." **A**



C'est magnifique

You don't have to be French to understand the appeal of *Rétromobile* in Paris. **CHARLIE MARTIN** goes hunting for rare and exceptional voitures

There's something fascinating about French cars – this intangible quality that's able to turn a humdrum machine

into something rather compelling. It's tricky to pin down, but if one is to tap the source of that famed va-va-voom anywhere, it's surely Rétromobile. Held on the outskirts of Paris, down the road from Parc André Citroën, it's a huge classic car bash that attracts the backing of major retailers, owners' clubs and manufacturers. You will see a real variety of stuff here, from a humble Peugeot 205 to the new Porsche 911 GT3 – even an ex-Michael Schumacher Formula 1 car.

One of the big draws this year is Renault's stand, where its new electric streamliner, the Filante, is making its first public outing. It's meant to set a new record for EV efficiency, but there's more to it

than rigorous engineering alone, for it's rather handsome to boot.

"Everything is simpler, more sleek," Renault design boss Gilles Vidal explains, suggesting the one-off creation not only had to meet a lofty technical goal but also look good while doing it.

It's this ethos – the intersection of world-beating engineering and jaw-dropping design – that defines many of the French icons on show.

Take the original Citroën DS as an example. Its famed hydropneumatic suspension played a big role in ensuring that it could challenge the likes of Mercedes-Benz in the luxury saloon market, but it was that unconventional design that captured hearts. So stunning were its proportions – Autocar reported in October 1956 that its rear wheels "could hardly be further aft, nor could the seating be more 'within the wheelbase'" – that it transcended motoring.

"Its stunning proportions transcended motoring"



New Renault 5 was bettered only by '80s WRC one (see right)



It was nice to see Mazda's 2008 MX-5 Superlight concept again



MS120D was raced in period by Jean-Pierre Beltoise, Henri Pescarolo and Chris Amon



New Filante recalls 1950s 'Shooting Star' salt-flats record car



Its transition into a work of art was completed in 1959 when Citroën adman Claude Puech proposed rigging one up with giant balloons in place of wheels to illustrate the DS's famed ride quality. It's one of the enduring images of the model and, having been faithfully recreated as Rétromobile's centrepiece, it draws a big crowd.

The artful touch isn't restricted to the nation's road-going machines. Around the corner from the DS is a Matra MS120D grand prix car from 1972, and it's a stunning work of sculpture. There's a sense of fluidity from its frontal intake all the way back to its rear spoiler, as if you could trace the flow of air over it by hand.

Down the way is a British-built BRM P160B from the same year – a more competitive F1 racer but nowhere near as pretty, with odd angles and strange protrusions all over the shop.

The rally cars aren't half bad either: one of Jean Ragnotti's 1980s Renault 5 Maxi Turbos is tucked away in a back corner, resplendent with not one, not two but six foglights. It's unlikely that monsieur really needed that much visibility, so maybe the two snout-like pods on the bonnet's leading edge were purely an expression of excess, a subtle hint at the Turbo's stonking performance.

On the subject of France's beloved Cinq, there's a furore brewing on the Renault stand. People are swarming the brand-new electric model, cooing. "C'est magnifique," one man says to his family, and his children concur: "C'est magnifique!"

It seems we're on the verge of a new era of design flair. If it just so happens to draw on the finest and indeed weirdest French machines like those seen at Rétromobile, bring it on. **A**

Our Rétromobile star cars



CITROËN TRACTION AVANT 11B 'CHROME'

This custard-yellow Traction Avant, nicknamed Chrome, is remarkable not for its specification – very close to standard – but its purpose. Next year, owner Eric Massiet du Biest intends to drive it all the way to Beijing and back, via Beirut.



ALPINE A500

The genesis of all the turbocharged performance cars of today: a top-secret F1 car used to test a boosted 1.5-litre V6 for Renault way back in 1975. It made some 500bhp, handily outpunching Cosworth's dominant DFV V8, but suffered severe teething troubles – amusingly described at Rétromobile as 'catastrophique'.



MATRA MURENA JPB

As rare as it is cool, this modified version of Matra's strange three-seat sports car is named after racing driver Jean-Pierre Beltoise. It got an upgraded 2.2-litre four-pot kicking out 226bhp, plus a Ferrari Testarossa-style bodykit. The racing version won three French rallycross titles back in its day.



DEVALLIET MUGELLO 375F GRAND PRIX

France's take on the Caterham Seven just oozes style – as it should. It's powered by Peugeot's 1.6-litre turbo four-pot, which sends 222bhp to the rear wheels through a limited-slip differential. And it weighs just 630kg, so it hits 62mph from a standstill in 4.5sec.

LIVING WITH A...

Where our long-term test cars have been and what they've done

"I feel the same about the Grenadier as I do the Alpine A110"

FIRST REPORT

INEOS GRENADIER

Ruggedly purposeful utilitarian 4x4 joins the Autocar fleet

WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To see whether the spirit of the classic Land Rover Defender really does live on here

Following a solid showing in our hardcore off-road test last month (Autocar 29 January), the very same Ineos Grenadier has now joined our long-term fleet.

Ineos makes a thing of how rugged and dependable it would like the Grenadier to be, so it arrived with 10,000 miles on it. We'll add as many as we can for the full ownership experience.

I'm to be its custodian, for a couple of reasons. First is because I live in the sticks and keep some animals, so the other people here think I'm a yokel (do excuse me while I put the Nespresso pods out for recycling). Second is they think I'm a sucker for a big and brash car that is more 4x4 than SUV. And on that count they would be right.

The Grenadier is a 4x4 rather than an SUV, if you want to make that distinction, and I think here it's right to do so. Ours is in Fieldmaster trim, and like all Grenadiers it has a separate body and chassis, live

front and rear axles and a low-ratio transfer case, plus here we have three manually lockable diffs.

The engine is a BMW-sourced 3.0-litre turbo petrol with 282bhp at just 4750rpm and 332lb ft from 1750rpm through to 4000rpm. It drives via an eight-speed automatic.

The powertrain is just one example of how Ineos looked beyond itself when it came to the Grenadier. Well-known automotive giant Magna Steyr was appointed as development partner, while the beam axles come from Carraro, experts in 'off-highway' drivelines. Basically it's all super-rugged stuff.



BMW 3.0-litre six-pot makes 282bhp

It is, then, more than capable of the things I'll be asking of it in my daily life, which means I'll be going literally and figuratively out of my way to challenge it in order to find out just what it's made of and take it outside its comfort zone. I'll be taking it outside its natural comfort zone, too, because it's got to cut both ways: this is a £76,140 car before options, and if you're going to spend that much it's fair to hope it will have a broad spread of abilities.

The hardware inevitably brings some compromises on the highway, of course. The same is true of most 4x4s that major on ruggedness, but it applies even more if, as here, it has been optioned for off-road use. The Rough Pack brings front and rear diff locks (to add to the standard centre one) and BF Goodrich KO2 tyres, which are among the best you can get. Ours also has a towbar, 'utility belt' (more on that another time), side runners, rubber mats and more.

Standard is recirculating ball

SECOND OPINION



Prior's was the first Grenadier I'd driven, although I met Jim Ratcliffe and his team during the project's early days in 2017. I liked his thinking but, honestly, I'm not 100% sold on the car. It's fun, but I wouldn't do enough off-roading to make the on-road compromises worth it. And there are just too many of those. **MS**

steering that's slower and less keen to self-centre than a rack and pinion set-up, but it's needed because the latter gives too much kickback on a live axle. The previous Land Rover Defender plus Suzuki's Jimny and the Jeep Wrangler all have it too.

How compromised does this stuff make the Grenadier on the road? Some people say the Ineos is an acquired taste; I wouldn't necessarily argue, but it's one that I have quickly come to like.



BF Goodrich KO2s don't muck about



Prior's rural life fits the Grenadier's bill



It rides pretty well on the road, but the steering takes some getting used to



Cockpit controls give off a slightly old-school aircraft flight deck vibe

In a way, I feel the same about the Grenadier as I do about an Alpine A110 or Toyota GT86: they're so focused on doing one thing that they're compromised elsewhere. Some people wanted the GT86 to have more power. It could be done, but more power means more cooling, better brakes, beefier steering, perhaps bigger tyres and so on, which all adds size and weight. So no; to enjoy its purity, you had to accept it was a bit wheezy.

If you want to appreciate all a Grenadier can do, then, you have to look beyond some of its shortcomings. The slow, advisory-capacity steering is the big one: I'm frequently making little direction changes, but they come so subconsciously I relax into them, a bit like driving a canal boat.

You can feel there's a lot of unsprung mass, too, but the Grenadier isn't uncomfortable. Far from it. It's really well isolated, and while it can be bumped around by big undulations, it's actually refined and quiet inside when driving on pockmarked asphalt.

And what an interior. Every passenger so far has said how they think Ineos has tried to make it look like a flight deck. I haven't used all of the buttons yet – some are for

external lights or accessories I don't have – but I really like the choices you can make in here.

The air vents are controlled by a knob on the actual vents; I can turn the lights on and off; I can lower the headlight beam; and I can change the cabin temperature without looking away from the road. Making a point of saying these things would have been unimaginable 20 years ago, but I couldn't do any of the above in the BMW i5 I've just stepped out of.

I have a lot of goodwill for a car that, compromised or not, treats me like an adult. I have a feeling I'm going to warm to the Grenadier. **MATT PRIOR**

TEST DATA

INEOS GRENADIER 3.0 T FIELDMASTER

Price new £76,140 Price as tested £88,917
Options Winch £3515, Rough Pack (diff locks, BF Goodrich tyres) £2370, 18in alloy wheels £1690, high load auxiliary switch panel £1170, metallic paint £1060, side runners £958, tow ball £630, privacy glass £455, exterior utility belt £420, lockable storage box £290, interior utility rails £160, tie-down rings £59
Faults None Expenses None Economy 18.9-19.6mpg (WLTP)

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GENESIS G80 EV

It's got the executive brief nailed, but how about the daily grind?

MILEAGE 14,896

WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT Does being the basis for an ICE model compromise the G80 as an EV?

I'm a sucker for some automotive incongruity, but that's not why I took the ambassadorial and opulent G80 to the rather less salubrious council recycling centre. Well, it's not the only reason... Does it look out of place? Like seeing an opera singer in a KFC. Funny.

Anyway, the G80's usual custodian, Steve Crolepy, had whisked away the Mini Cooper S for a few days, and while I was quaking at the prospect of threading his comparatively gigantic Genesis down my cul de sac, I was relishing the opportunity to empty my shed of the accumulated detritus that had failed to fit in the supermini.

Squeezing all of my broken Christmas decorations, garden trimmings and cardboard boxes into the G80's 424-litre boot was a cinch, and it left plenty of room on the back seat for all the recycling from my New Year's Eve party (I'd rather not discuss, never mind show a photo, of just how many bottles and cans there were...) and a knackered coffee machine that was approaching antiquity. That still

left plenty of space in the generous rear footwells, so I was also able to return a borrowed patio heater to my dad and collect a recently acquired second-hand footstool while I was out and about: driving is all about efficiency in 2025.

The G80 took it all like a champ, of course, with no cramming or contorting needed to squeeze everything in, and there was barely any jingling and jangling from my rubbish on the way there – despite the awful state of the roads and the ridiculous number of speed bumps en route. Who needs a Transit?

Errands dispatched, and the next day it was time to use the Genesis as intended, with a scheduled photoshoot necessitating a 200-mile motorway journey – and a tight timeframe that left no opportunity for charge stops. Fortunately, even with the temperature just below 8deg C, the G80 was promising a little under 260 miles on an 85% charge, and that figure only dipped slightly once I'd whisked it up to 70mph on the M25. I arrived at my East Midlands destination with more than enough to get home again, even with the heater on all of the time and a less-than-cautiously applied right foot.

This is plainly not conceived as a do-it-all car, but it does a pretty convincing impression of one. The G80 is practical, efficient, smooth, quick, handsome and luxurious. It's also remarkably short on compromise and fits into my life as well as any EV yet has – even if it didn't quite fit down my road.

FELIX PAGE

TEST DATA

GENESIS ELECTRIFIED G80

Price new £69,905 Price as tested £84,265
Faults None Expenses None Range 272 miles
Economy 3.2mpkWh Last seen 19.2.25

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G80 disgorged the contents of Page's shed without even batting a sharply suited eyelid

VOLVO EX40

A coastal excursion reveals great refinement, but range could be better

MILEAGE 2042

WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To see if this veteran is actually the pick of Volvo's growing, tech-first EV range

Shortly after starting life with a new car, it's become a ritual for me to take it on a south-westerly trip across the country to get properly acquainted.

Our Volvo EX40 comes with the larger, 79kWh battery that is claimed to offer a range of up to 340 miles, so there was initially some hope that I'd make it the full 302 miles from north London to Lizard Point without stopping. The plan never stood a chance, however, once a meagre '220 miles' appeared on the range display as I set off.

That was enough to get me to my usual stopping point of Exeter services, where a Gridserve charger replenished the battery from 10-80% at a peak rate of 145kW (not far off the EV's claimed 155kW maximum). It meant I didn't have to sit in the car park for more than 30 minutes during the worst storm of the year.

The journey itself was silky-smooth. This Volvo's ride quality over long distances is excellent, with its cossetting front seats and unobtrusive ADAS technology helping to shrink hours-long drives.

Its 252bhp electric motor was more than a match for the hilly A303 and faster A30, but it was here that efficiency took a big hit. The EX40 returned an economy of 2.4 miles per kWh for the duration of the journey. That's equivalent to around 190 miles of range – nowhere near the WLTP figure.

It's a world away from the nearly

Reversing into a parking space can trigger unwanted driver assist interventions...



200kg-lighter Cupra Born I ran previously: that car routinely achieved 4.5mpkWh at highway speeds. But where the 2001kg Volvo has the Cupra beaten is refinement, in which area the EX40 has so far been hard to fault.

Those comfort seats, fitted as standard in Plus-spec models like ours, live up to their name and like the steering wheel are heated too, so I'm kept warm without being too reliant on energy-sapping climate control. This electric SUV

LOVE IT

PRACTICALITY

A big boot and plenty of rear passenger leg room mean nothing – and nobody – gets left behind on holidays.

LOATHE IT

REAR AUTO BRAKING

It detects objects that simply don't exist – but I have no doubt it would save me from a crash.

does a good job of nullifying wind and road noise too. The EX40 certainly stakes a strong claim to being among the most refined and relaxing models in its class.

Unlike in the newer, more technologically advanced Volvos on sale today, the EX40's safety kit leaves you largely to your own devices, and its software doesn't intrude. Switch off the lane assist, driver monitoring and other hand-holding systems, and they stay off.

The only feature that switches on (owing to European legislation) each time you start the car is the speed limit warning, which for me isn't a problem. The system reads roadside speed limit signs and motorway gantries effectively, and it augments that with GPS data. It's actually quite handy to have in London, which is beset with continually changing speed limits. Over 2000 miles so far, I have yet to experience any difficulties or erroneous speed limit detection.

While most of the tech is simple to use and (for the most part) effective,

it's not perfect. The regular cruise control works well, but the Pilot Assist system takes some getting used to. It is in effect a semi-autonomous cruise control that can support braking, steering and acceleration, but it feels a bit odd in practice. It lacks the smoothness of BMW's Active Cruise Control: the steering wheel jerks around in small increments rather than with intuitive movements, and drivers behind must think I'm correcting my steering way too often. When news editor Will Rimell ran an XC40 Recharge (as the EX40 was previously known) in a different spec, he had no issues with the same system and suggested it made his commute far easier, so I'll persevere with it to see if my thoughts change.

One frustrating feature I doubt I'll get used to is the automatic braking system that functions when reversing. It detects obstacles to the side of the car and immediately behind, plus traffic when you're backing out of a parking space. It also seems to detect ghosts: often when I'm reversing, it will apply the brakes jarringly for no reason, both spooking me and making me look like a buffoon. Still, it's a fairly minor gripe that takes little away from the EX40's overall charm.

JACK WARRICK

TEST DATA

VOLVO EX40 SINGLE MOTOR LONG RANGE PLUS

Price new £54,305 Price as tested £54,305
Faults None Expenses None Range 205 miles
Economy 2.6mpkWh Last seen 12.2.25

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...but it could come in handy if you're edging towards Britain's southern tip





LEXUS RX

Our big plug-in hybrid proves it's no one-trick pony

MILEAGE 3703

WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT Is the OG hybrid luxury SUV still the best?

Our expectations of what a luxury car should offer have evolved since Toyota's upmarket Lexus brand was launched in 1989. The original LS 400 was exceptionally comfortable and refined, but it was resolutely an executive express: all work and no play. It was brilliant at it, though, and Lexus soon became a fixture of the motoring landscape.

These days we demand that our luxury cars are a little less one-dimensional. They must be as adept at family life – the school run, muddy weekend dog walk, tip run or holiday road trip – as they are at the commute or a motorway blast to a meeting. All of which explains the rise and rise of the luxury SUV.

The RX has delivered even better than expected in this respect: this is a seriously practical car, not least because it's so big. Accommodation for my dog is palatial (even if he has to mind his head on the supports for the luggage cover), and with the



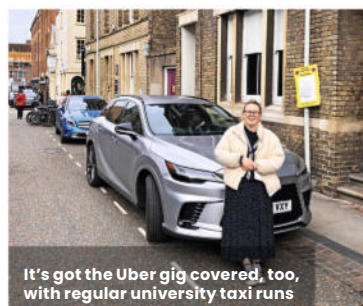
Huge load bay means the Lexus could moonlight as an Airbnb

seats lowered I managed to squeeze in an entire double mattress (unfolded) for its send-off at the tip.

Dropping the rear bench is easy thanks to a couple of electric releases beside the tailgate (also electric, opening via a 'virtual pedal'), but you do have to put them back manually. The boot is nice and square and feels larger than its claimed 461-litre capacity. It proved ideal when a colleague begged a borrow for a house move, shuttling several loads swiftly and securely on icy roads during a cold snap.

I do have the odd complaint: unless the rear seats are fully reclined (something my youngest daughter appreciates), there is a gap between the seatback and the load-bay cover that leaves your shopping exposed; and for a reason I have yet to fathom, sometimes the one-touch boot-close-and-lock button refuses to obey, emitting an angry beeping in response. Admittedly, that is a rather first-world problem...

I'm struggling to think of a better companion for the now regular motorway schlep, fully laden, to take my daughter to and from university: she has to empty her room at the end of each term, so it's always a large load. The RX swallows the lot without even dropping the rear seats, so the



It's got the Uber gig covered, too, with regular university taxi runs

whole family can come along to wave her off. Once packed, the rest of the car's impressive armoury comes to the fore: the seats are fantastically comfortable, and the drivetrain is refined (unless you're really thrashing the four-pot turbo engine) and surprisingly frugal for such a large car, its hybrid system working well even when your pre-trip charge has been exhausted.

Add in effortless power and pace and it makes for a remarkably relaxed way to cover large distances with four people and lots of kit. It's probably the complete modern luxury car – just a shame its driver isn't quite so on the ball. I didn't realise Oxford's low-emission zone was actually a zero-emission zone, and the £2 it would have cost me to enter the city centre in the Lexus was multiplied many times over when a fine landed on my doormat. Lesson learned, I guess.

ALASTAIR CLEMENTS

TEST DATA

LEXUS RX 450H+ F SPORT DESIGN

Price new £69,995 Price as tested £70,245 Faults None Expenses None Economy 66.7mpg Last seen 5.2.25

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SNAPSHOTS



MINI COOPERS

Mileage 3767 **Last seen** 19.2.25

I always struggle with resisting the urge to clean my car at this time of year: it's a waste of time and money given how quickly the grime and salt accumulates. But I'm quite enjoying the rally-refugee vibe that the Mini takes on when it's especially caked. It almost feels like a badge of honour: enduring proof of some arduous but enjoyable mid-winter schleps. Plus it obscures the childish racing stripes. **FP**



MAZDA MX-5

Mileage 6138 **Last seen** 19.2.25

Can anyone help out with this curiosity? Yes, it looks as though I've been painting alloy marks on my tyres to make it seem like I have larger wheels. But I haven't, I promise. I quite like the effect, actually – it goes with the utterly filthy vibe the MX-5 currently has – but I've lost about 15 minutes to Google and come out none the wiser. Airflow – generally, I suppose – is probably the answer. But, erm, how? **MSc**



AUDI A3 SPORTBACK

Mileage 2092 **Last seen** 12.2.25

Speed recognition systems can be genuinely helpful, given how many roads lack regular signage. But there are still hiccups, the worst so far, at least in the A3, being when the system said I was in a 20mph zone, not a 50. Okay, perhaps I wouldn't get points on my licence, but it could be dangerous in a different way. Naturally, I have no picture because I was driving. **RB**

LOVE IT

MAKE MINE A DOUBLE

Who knew a two-level cupholder was a thing? It actually works well, dropping low from its 'cup' setting to comfortably accommodate a drinks bottle.

LOATHE IT

SIZE MATTERS

There is a drawback to the RX's huge size: it's too big for a modern multi-storey. No wonder it picked up a nasty scratch on the door on a recent visit.

USED CARS

HOW TO BUY A
SKODA OCTAVIA



WHEN SKODA HIT THE FAMILY CAR BULLSEYE

There's an Octavia to suit almost everyone. Here's how to choose

Any list of spacious family shuttles for buyers to consider will have a Skoda featuring high up in it. Nine times out of 10, that Skoda will be the Octavia, thanks to its all-round ability, pleasing road manners and unwavering durability.

Whether you're loading up the estate with your kids and clobber or filling the passenger seats with riff-raff from the town centre to taxi them home, the Octavia is like an old friend: it won't let you down, whatever the circumstances.

Early versions are pretty leggy and show their age rather poorly, so it's the third-generation car we're championing here. It's smart-looking (the post-2017 facelift particularly so), ticks the family car boxes and costs from around £3000.

From launch you had a choice of 1.2-litre and 1.4-litre petrol fours, making 104bhp and 138bhp respectively. Both are smooth and efficient, but the 1.4 does offer more poke and is the better fit in the slightly heavier estate – and even if you're a regular motorway user you'll get around 40mpg out of it.

If you're after more fuel economy then the diesels are a better pick, but we'd avoid the sluggish 1.6 TDI, despite a claimed 72mpg. Instead go for the tank-like 148bhp 2.0 TDI: it offers brisk performance and decent refinement and frugality, and it's quiet at idle and remains so under harsher acceleration. The balance of performance and efficiency is impressive, and the ride and handling is competent, but don't expect too much in the way of excitement.



Spacious cabin is comfy but not showy. All trims have decent kit levels

What we said then 10 APRIL 2013

"The car's practicality is outstanding, while material quality and equipment are as good as anything at the price. Those looking for comfortable, robust, well-appointed family transport could do no better, and ultimately that's what earns this car its fourth full road test star."

isn't terrible, and there are several specialists that can up the power to well above 300bhp should you wish. Four-wheel drive could be added as an option, but these are in shorter supply in the classifieds.

If you want your Octavia to be a year-round warrior that's as comfortable on the road as it is barrelling down a gravel track, there's the four-wheel-drive Scout. Its raised suspension, plastic bumpers and underbody protection give it a rugged aesthetic, and its mix of genuine off-road dynamics, comfort and refinement make it a solid choice.

You can choose between a six-speed manual or a DSG dual-clutch auto from the Volkswagen Group parts bin: both are smooth and easy to get along with, so really it will come down to personal preference.

VW Group hardware abounds: the Octavia sits on the MQB platform, but it has a slightly bigger wheelbase than the technically related Volkswagen Golf.

The Octavia's cabin itself is both roomy and spacious, and both the estate and hatchback models trumped rivals on boot space, with the former offering up to 610 litres of capacity and the hatchback an impressive 590 litres.

Inside, the cabin is simple and straightforward with clear controls and decent materials. There are some signs of austerity lower down with some scratchier plastics, and if you're after more quality and better technology, the facelifted version is the one to go for. Try to find a later car with the 8.0in touchscreen infotainment system if you can – it's the same as the one in the Mk7.5 Golf and it's graphically strong and easy to use. Other than that, you needn't worry too much about trim levels, because this isn't a showy car for bragging rights in a supermarket or pub car park. The Octavia is a people's car through and through, and anyone looking for a comfortable, hassle-free family car could do little better.

SAM PHILLIPS

How to get one in your garage

AN OWNER'S VIEW DARREN DOO

"I've owned my 2015 petrol vRS for around two and a half years, and it now has just over 105,000 miles on the clock. I initially wanted an estate but ended up with the hatch because the boot space isn't much different. I've modified it subtly during my ownership: it's been remapped to 326bhp and has a Maxton Design bodykit fitted. I had to upgrade the clutch as a result of the power increase, and I changed the expansion tank because mine had a silica bag, which is prone to bursting and ruining the heater matrix. Overall, it's a fast and comfortable car, and even with the remap it will do 42mpg."

BUYER BEWARE...

■ WATER PUMP

Look out for pools of coolant underneath the car. This could be down to a premature water pump failure, which is a common fault on the third-generation EA888 engine. High engine temperatures, an engine warning light or a whining from the engine bay are all signs of accelerated wear. A replacement costs around £350–£500.

■ GEARBOX

The DSG dual-clutch automatic gearbox is generally a smooth operator, but be wary of any jerky shifts if you're road testing a high-mileage example.

If you're buying a remapped car, check that the clutch has been upgraded for a more robust item: the standard-fit clutch struggles to handle big increases in power output.

■ DIESEL PARTICULATE FILTER

Those who only cover short distances should opt for a petrol: diesels can suffer from DPF issues, which tend to relate to the DPF sensor rather than the DPF itself.

■ BODY

We'd have a good look at the bumpers and the underside of any car, but cast a closer eye over a Scout model, which may have seen use on unmade roads.

Be wary of later cars with a panoramic sunroof, because these are prone to leaks. Check the headliner and history of the car to see if it has been replaced.

ALSO WORTH KNOWING

Four-wheel-drive, Scout and vRS models are best for towing, with the latter capable of hauling up



to 2000kg, which makes it ideal if you're a caravan owner.

Early Octavias were available in S, SE and Elegance trims. The latter was renamed SE L, and the Laurin & Klement trim joined as the range-topping variant.

As part of the Octavia's facelift in 2017, the engine line-up was tweaked slightly: the 1.2-litre TSI was dropped for a 1.0-litre three-cylinder unit, and the petrol-engined vRS model was given an additional 10bhp, for a peak output of 227bhp.

HOW MUCH TO SPEND

£3000–£8999

Diesels dominate here, particularly the 1.6-litre TDI, but plenty of high-mileage cars and a good mix of hatchbacks and estates. Some one-owner and full-service-history cars, too.

£9000–£14,999

Mileage and age vary a lot in this price range, but you can get into a post-facelift car with reasonable miles easily enough.

£15,000–£17,999

Predominantly dealer cars with reasonable to low mileages on the clock. Plenty of choice of trims and engines, too. Cars generally in immaculate condition.

£18,000 AND ABOVE

Dealer-only examples with low mileages and in pristine condition. The vRS Octavias dominate at this price point.



ONE WE FOUND

SKODA OCTAVIA 2.0 TDI SCOUT 4WD, 2015, 75,000 MILES, £10,790

We'd be tempted by this two-owner-from-new Octavia Scout not only for its ultra-rare spec but also for its relatively low mileage, extensive service history and four-wheel drive. It's also ULEZ-compliant, and its MOT isn't due until September.

If you're looking for a dynamic edge – and a bit more oomph – then we'd direct you towards the vRS variants. Pleasingly, you have a choice of petrol and diesel, but while the oil-burner has plenty of torque and 181bhp, we'd select the 217bhp 2.0-litre turbo petrol for the true sporty experience. Economy

Scout trim added extra body protection and raised the ride height



"We'd go for the 217bhp 2.0-litre turbo petrol vRS for the true sporty Octavia experience"



I didn't feel that one Mustang was enough

Steve Collis likes his Ford Mustang Bullitt so much that he bought another.

Well, not another exactly, but certainly a Mustang that the great detective himself would recognise: a 1968 convertible. Sadly, he has not driven it to this particular meeting of his car club, because there's too much salt on the roads. "It's not a performance car: it's a piece of theatre, like the modern one, but it needs protecting," he says. "The modern one" Steve refers to is his 2020 Bullitt coupé, purchased second-hand showing 18,000 miles from Hendy Performance two years ago and the car he has chosen to drive today.

"The weird thing is I had no intention of getting anything like a modern Mustang," he says. "I was actually in the queue to buy a Lotus Emira but I got bumped back and then the price went up. I cancelled my order and got my deposit back. Then, two weeks later, I saw the Bullitt for sale at Hendy Performance.

"I took it for a drive and, with its aftermarket exhaust, it sounded better than the Emira and actually went faster. It doesn't handle as well, of course, but it's still very good. Above all, it was the sound of the exhaust that really attracted me – plus, at £46,000, it was less than



Our cars

Slowly broken by tiny hands



BY BEN SUMMERELL-YOUBE

My fast family wagon, a B7-gen Audi A4 Avant,

isn't living up to its perceived interior strengths as well as I'd hoped. The armrest has been broken by my toddler, his window's motor has started to fail and both child seats are leaving worrying marks on the leather seats.

The tailgate trim is also barely hanging on, but I suspect it has been repeatedly pulled off in the past, as one of the numberplate lights refuses to work properly despite new bulbs and connectors.

The car is actually full of little niggles that I hadn't noticed before I bought it, but at this very busy time of year I just don't really care. It was bought to be used and

abused, and as long as it keeps passing its MOT tests, I shall mostly ignore all of this.

As much as I'd love to have something brand new on my drive, I can't imagine anything worse than putting children inside it to slowly rip it to pieces.



Still looks good after all these years. Just don't look too closely



Steve has had the V8 remapped and it now produces 500bhp



Ignore the signs of cost-cutting and just listen to the noise the V8 makes

"Of all the cars I've owned, the Bullitt is my favourite. It makes me smile every time I drive it"

half the cost of the Emira. However, it's not half the car!"

That it runs the Emira close, says Steve, is thanks partly to that exhaust and an engine map he has had done that means the Bullitt's big

V8 now makes 500bhp compared with a regular Bullitt's 473bhp. "Of all the cars I've owned and driven, the Bullitt is my favourite," he says. "Even though it's not the fastest or at times the most comfortable, it's the

one car that makes me smile every time I drive it. It has soul."

Currently, his family's car collection runs to a Subaru WRX STi (his wife's), a Mercedes-AMG CLA 45 and that aforementioned '68 Mustang convertible, so he's reasonably qualified to know.

"I like that behind all its creature comforts – the Recaro seats and the 1000W sound system and technologies including lane keeping assist and active cruise control – it's just a big, manual V8," says Steve. "The gearchange is reasonably light, although not as 'snicky' as the Tremec gearbox in the later Mach 1 version; you have to think a bit more about changes. I don't find the clutch particularly tiring but I know some people have the pedal action lightened to make it easier. To my mind, these are all part of the car's character."

Running costs are what you might expect: £480 for the last minor and £780 for the major service, which included eight new spark plugs. "Hendy Performance services it and they do their best to keep costs down but it requires a lot of oil!" says Steve, who pays £320 to insure the Bullitt for himself and his wife on an Admiral multi-car policy. Fuel economy? "On a club drive at Blyton Park race track, I got it down to 7.8mpg. Cruising here today, though, I got 33mpg."

Steve accepts the Bullitt has its shortcomings but his love for it remains undimmed.

"In the cabin, you can see where Ford has saved money," he says, "but none of that affects how the Bullitt drives and I'll take that sound over anything!"

JOHN EVANS

CAUGHT IN THE CLASSIFIEDS



MERCEDES-AMG C63 S COUPE

2020, 16,000 miles, £45,995

Exciting, engaging and rapid, the C63 S is focused when you want it to be, but it can excite its rear tyres for sideways thrills too. This car's 503bhp twin-turbo V8 is sure to appeal, as will its full Mercedes service history and low mileage.



AUDI RS5 4.2 QUATTRO COUPE

2015, 59,500 miles, £21,000

It may have slightly less power than the Mustang (left), but this previous-generation RS5 with the punchier and aurally pleasing V8 is actually 1.3sec quicker from 0-60mph. It's finished in ultra-desirable Sepang blue and has £3500 of original factory options.



LEXUS RC F

2015, 44,000 miles, £26,995

For V8 drama and as a left-field choice, the RC F is a fine sports coupé, even if it isn't as rewarding to drive as the RS5 and C63 S above. With an extensive service history, reasonable miles and a packed specification, this one's a steal.



BENTLEY CONTINENTAL V8 GT S

2015, 54,000 miles, £39,948

If you want your V8 coupé to come with a luxurious edge, this frankly stunning V8 GT S will grab your attention. Blue over cream leather, Mulliner driver's pack and seven Bentley service stamps make it a superb buy.



WILL RIMELL



2017 VOLVO V90 D5 POWERPULSE AWD INSCRIPTION PRO

VS

JAMES ATTWOOD



1995 VOLVO 850 T5-R ESTATE LIMITED EDITION

Head to head

Brief: Volvo estates are back! Find us a tasty one for less than £15,000

JA Behold, an 850 T5-R in cracking condition and the proper colour, for just £14,999. The only cooler Volvo estate is blue and white and has 'Rydell' written on the rear window.

WR What a machine indeed, with that 240bhp five-cylinder petrol. But no matter: I've found Volvo's best-looking car in the cleanest finish with a chestnut wood interior and a muscular yet efficient 2.0-litre diesel four for £274 less.

JA Okay, yours is probably more reliable and a better load-lugging daily driver. But I believe this T5-R's seller is genuine when he says it's well maintained and trust

that, even when it's a performance beast, 147,000 miles still counts as infancy for a Volvo...

WR No matter how well maintained it is, I worry that you'll be spending the same at your local garage within the year.

JA At least I know you'll have plenty of space to give me a lift back from the garage if it does indeed have an issue...

WR Ha! I think what we've done here is assemble the perfect two-car garage. No, no, now hear me out: I've got my sensible daily wagon that will work flawlessly all week and return some mega mileage in the V90; then you've got a wacky weekend toy in the T5-R.

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Model	Dims	Order Code	exc.VAT	inc.VAT	WAS
CIG81212	3.6 x 3.6 x 2.5m	140613584	£249.00	£298.80	
CIG81015	4.5 x 3 x 2.4m	140613570	£279.00	£334.80	
CIG81216	4.9 x 3.7 x 2.5m	140613574	£319.00	£394.80	£382.80
CIG81020	6.1 x 3 x 2.4m	140613572	£349.00	£418.80	
CIG81220	6.1 x 3.7 x 2.5m	140613576	£389.00	£478.80	£466.80
CIG81224	7.3 x 3.7 x 2.5m	140613578	£489.00	£586.80	£566.80
CIG1432	9.7 x 4.3 x 3.65m	140613594	£1099.00	£1318.80	
CIG1640	12 x 4.9 x 4.3m	140613596	£2599.00	£3118.80	



CIG81220

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1M
LEADS**

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**FROM
£86.99
exc.VAT
£104.39 inc.VAT**

Model	Starts Engines up to	Peak Amps	Order Code	exc.VAT	inc.VAT
JS1100	3L	1100	010310017	£86.99	£104.39
JS1224LIN	6L	1200	010318905	£144.99	£173.99
JS4000	6L	2200	010311030	£164.99	£197.99
JS12/24	6L	2000	010311224	£179.98	£215.98

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£579.00
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£694.80 inc.VAT**

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WASHER**

HARRY 2

050412181



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Model	Min/Max Amps	Order Code	exc.VAT	inc.VAT
MIG103NG	35-90	010115615	£134.99	£161.99
IMIG100NG	40-100	010115610	£149.98	£179.98



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CTJ2250LP

Model	Type	Tonne	Order Code	exc.VAT	inc.VAT
CTJ2L	Long	2	020110275	£42.99	£51.59
CTJ2250LP*	Low Profile	2.25	020113070	£49.98	£59.98
CTJ3000GB	Pro Garage	3	020113032	£109.98	£131.98
CTJ3000QLC	Pro Garage Quick Lift	3	020113210	£114.99	£137.99
CTJ2QLP#	Low Quick Lift	2	020111820	£152.99	£183.59

* CTJ2250LP has a 2.25 tonne capacity, has a low entry of only 80mm and includes 2 sockets **WAS £191.98 inc.VAT**

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1M
LEADS**

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£86.99
exc.VAT
£104.39 inc.VAT**

Model	Starts Engines up to	Peak Amps	Order Code	exc.VAT	inc.VAT
JS1100	3L	1100	010310017	£86.99	£104.39
JS1224LIN	6L	1200	010318905	£144.99	£173.99
JS4000	6L	2200	010311030	£164.99	£197.99
JS12/24	6L	2000	010311224	£179.98	£215.98

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Model	Description	Order Code	exc.VAT	inc.VAT
1 CB2203C	3 Dr step up	070118012	£86.99	£104.39
2 CB2209C	9 Dr Chest	070118032	£154.99	£185.99
3 CB2217C	7 Dr Cabinet	070118057	£279.00	£334.80

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CTJ1250AB

Model	Lifting Cap.	Order Code	exc.VAT	inc.VAT	WAS
CTJ1500QL	1.5T	020112633	£104.99	£125.99	£125.99
CTJ1250AC	1.25T	020111818	£129.98	£155.98	£155.98
CTJ2500QLGB	2.5T	020112803	£169.98	£203.98	£203.98
CTJ1800AB	1.8T	020113202	£194.99	£239.98	£239.98

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Patrolman's salute showed AA members they were safe to proceed



AA set up to help drivers avoid speeding fines

The AA today is a wide-reaching organisation whose services range from insurance and breakdown cover to giving driving lessons and general advice. It's perhaps hard to believe, then, that this trusted body has its origins in a law-dodging activist group.

The story begins in the pages of *Autocar*, dated 25 March 1905, with a delightfully sardonic letter from a motorist named Walter Gibbons, entitled *To Circumvent Police Traps*.

These Edwardian equivalents of speed cameras were stopwatch-wielding policemen "hidden in hedges or ditches by the side of the most open roads in the country", as motoring pioneer Earl Russell later put it to the House of Lords.

Police traps had sprung up after the passing of 1903's controversial Motor Car Act, which introduced driving licences, car registration, the offence of reckless driving and an increase in the national limit from 14mph to 20mph but also the possibility of fines or jail for those breaking it.

There was a long-standing distrust between motorists and the authorities, as Gibbons demonstrated: "Although the police may be honestly inclined, at the same time motorists are looked upon by the police much in the same manner as an angler would view a

running stream: the fish are hidden under the waters, and by fair means or otherwise they must be caught.

"The police are inflexible; they have an electric timing apparatus, produced in court, including the bell and battery. The chief magistrate and his colleagues look in awe upon this instrument of torture. An electrical timing apparatus! How easily is the conscience stifled!

"Although the motorist may assure the magistrate that he dare not send the car round corners at such speeds as are attributed to him on a greasy road, and although

he can show an undefiled licence, yet - 'Certainly, I fine you £15 [that's £1550 in today's money]. You were timed by an electrical apparatus.'"

Neither the Royal Automobile Club (RAC) nor the Motor Union appeared inclined to enter into this fight, wrote Gibbons, and so a new organisation ought to be formed - perhaps named the Motorists' Protection Association.

Just a few weeks later, a letter from Charles Jarrott, a famous racing driver and importer of cars - and a previous recipient of a court summons for furious driving - answered his call.

"We have arranged for a special staff of cyclists bearing red flags to patrol the Brighton Road [now the M23/A23] and caution all those whom they consider are travelling at a speed which is illegal or dangerous. This will, no doubt, be very helpful to motorists, as the cyclists who are employed are skilled in judging speed and will be able to indicate to any driver who is travelling at a speed which will cause the intervention of the police.

"We hope that our efforts will remove any reason for complaint in a way which will cause no irritation to the public and will satisfy the police that it is unnecessary for them to continue the use of traps."

The scheme proved successful from the off, and soon the cycle

patrols had developed a system of signals and salutes. They officially formed the Automobile Association in 1905, under a William Bosworth.

Today, if you flash your lights to warn oncoming drivers of a speed trap, you risk being convicted for obstructing an officer in the course of their duty - a legal precedent set in a case brought against the AA in 1910. It was *perhaps* for this reason that members were advised that they should always stop to talk with a patrolman who failed to salute...

Clearly the AA's service greatly appealed, as by the outbreak of the Great War it had 83,000 members.

Driving these days, you always feel like you're being watched. One lapse of concentration could land you in hot water. So it's easy to pine for a 'simpler time' - but in all truthfulness, there never really was one. At least now, that speed camera will almost definitely tell the truth and will be painted bright yellow, rather than being a hidden copper with a desire to return to the days when cars simply didn't exist.

KRIS CULMER



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ROAD TEST RESULTS

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Until recently, it was thought that our first instrumented road test report was published on an Austin Seven in April 1928, but fresh research has lately revealed that the tradition is older still.

For more than a century, these road tests have been verifying, describing and illustrating the performance and characteristics in close detail, one new car at a time. Driving impressions have always been a key component part of them, around which other elements have changed. In early years, these test elements included benchmarking of braking effort, gradient climbing capability and rolling resistance. Later they expanded to take in acceleration, top speed and stopping distance, as well as cruising noise level. Cabin dimensions and measured weight became included too.

Today we use the Horiba MIRA proving ground in the Midlands to take similar performance benchmarks of new cars – and we've recently expanded the test's remit to take in braking stamina over repeated stops and, in the case of electrified cars, DC rapid-charging performance and measured acceleration at both high and low indicated state of charge. All are key indicators of the integrity of vehicle engineering in this emerging era.

Some of our road tests also include lap-time performance benchmarks where appropriate, but all are designed first and foremost to assess the fitness for intended purpose of any given new car – and to do it better and more thoroughly than any other independent test there is.

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Matt Saunders, road test editor

0-60mph
30-70mph
Kerb weight
Touring economy
Electric range

ABARTH

500 Esseesse ★★★★★ 25.3.09
Charm on a stick. Raucous and fun.
7.6 6.5 1135 35.8 -

500e Turismo ★★★★★ 9.8.23
A stylish and entertaining pint-size EV but pricey and needs refining.
6.9 6.4 1395 - 142

595 Competizione ★★★★★ 26.2.14
Great when it's good but tiring when it's bad.
7.5 6.4 1135 39.2 -

ALFA ROMEO

Giulia Quadrifoglio ★★★★★ 29.3.17
Everything you would want a fast Alfa Romeo saloon to be. A triumph.
4.5 3.2 1700 35.7 -

Stelvio 2.2D 210 Milano Edizione ★★★★★ 3.1.18
Spry-handling SUV is likeable, if short of the class's usual refinements.
6.8 7.0 1815 49.7 -

Stelvio Quadrifoglio ★★★★★ 9.1.19
A real driver's car, but it stretches SUV-related bounds of acceptability.
4.0 3.3 1931 31.9 -

Stelvio 2.0T 280 Veloce AWD ★★★★★ 28.6.23
Short on premium refinement but meets its discreetly sporty brief well.
5.7 5.3 1784 32.2 -

ALPINE

A110 Première Edition ★★★★★ 16.5.18
Hilarious fun delivered in effusive and accessible fashion.
4.7 3.8 1125 45.6 -

A110 Légende GT ★★★★★ 9.3.22
The best fast A110 we've seen but not quite the definitive version.
4.8 3.9 1140 40.2 -

A110 R ★★★★★ 15.11.23
Hardcore A110 has its lures but probably not enough of them for its price.
4.2 3.5 1094 39.7 -

ARIEL

Atom 4 ★★★★★ 9.10.19
Track-slayer is unrivalled for built-in quality and dynamic character.
3.2 2.4 680 39.2 -

ASTON MARTIN

Vantage ★★★★★ 18.9.24
Baby Aston grows up to spectacular effect. A machine of stunning breadth and likeability.
3.5 2.6 1745 28.5 -

DBS Superleggera ★★★★★ 21.11.18
Effortlessly fast and intoxicating to drive, the big Aston is better than ever.
3.7 2.7 1910 25.6 -

DBX ★★★★★ 28.10.20
Does everyday driver appeal better than any other super-SUV.
4.6 3.8 2328 24.8 -

0-60mph
30-70mph
Kerb weight
Touring economy
Electric range

0-60mph
30-70mph
Kerb weight
Touring economy
Electric range

DBX 707 ★★★★★ 30.11.22
A better DBX to drive, but still leaves room for improvement.
3.3 2.8 2278 26.2 -

AUDI

A1 Sportback 35 TFSI S Line Style Edition ★★★★★ 2.10.19
Luxury supermini lacks the polish to justify its high price.
7.9 8.4 1209 57.0 -

S3 Sportback ★★★★★ 18.11.20
Audi delivers an effective if somewhat unlovable hot hatch.
4.8 4.2 1552 39.0 -

RS4 Avant ★★★★★ 14.2.18
A hot estate that oozes class but is curiously short on charisma.
4.0 3.5 1790 36.7 -

S4 TDI ★★★★★ 18.9.19
Diesel power sparks an appealingly different identity for this fast Audi.
4.6 4.1 1871 54.3 -

S5 Launch Edition ★★★★★ 15.1.25
Rounded sports saloon with a characterful V6 and new-found dose of driver appeal.
4.1 3.8 2027 33.7 -

A5 Sportback 2.0 TFSI 252PS Quattro S Line S Tronic ★★★★★ 8.3.17
Sleek mid-sized executive fastback is still short of a selling point beyond its style.
5.7 5.3 1535 41.1 -

A6 Avant 40 TDI S Line S Tronic ★★★★★ 14.11.18
High-tech throwback is a timely reminder of what Audi does best.
8.4 7.5 1710 50.1 -

RS6 Avant GT ★★★★★ 5.2.25
Retro visual charm meets unprecedented dynamism in big-hearted estate.
3.2 2.7 2144 26.3 -

A6 50 TFSIe Quattro S Line ★★★★★ 5.1.22
Hybrid tech boosts saloon's refinement, charm and running credentials.
5.7 5.2 2077 45.4 34

A7 Sportback 50 TDI Quattro Sport ★★★★★ 11.7.18
Easy on the eye and to live with but let down by stolid dynamics.
5.8 5.3 1880 53.1 -

A8 L 60 TFSIe Quattro Sport ★★★★★ 17.6.20
Technically impressive but not as cossetting as a limo ought to be.
- - 2330 - -

E-tron 55 Quattro ★★★★★ 26.6.19
A rounded, uber-luxurious addition to the premium EV niche.
5.4 4.2 2569 - 218

E-tron S Quattro ★★★★★ 2.6.21
A slick, tech-laden luxury operator but no dynamic landmark for EVs.
4.2 3.6 2643 - -

Q21.4 TFSI Sport ★★★★★ 9.11.16
Fit for purpose but a less compelling option than it might have been.
8.1 8.2 1316 - -

SQ2 Quattro S Tronic ★★★★★ 20.3.19
More fun than you might expect from a crossover or an Audi S model.
4.5 4.1 1530 34.5 -

0-60mph
30-70mph
Kerb weight
Touring economy
Electric range

Q4 E-tron 40 Sport ★★★★★ 7.7.21
Practical, pleasant and efficient but not a superior premium product.
8.1 7.8 2112 - -

Q5 2.0 TDI 190PS Quattro S Line S Tronic ★★★★★ 15.3.17
Like the previous Q5 but with additional class, dynamism and polish.
8.3 8.5 1770 42.5 -

SQ5 TSI Quattro ★★★★★ 21.6.17
Mid-sized performance SUV bites off more than it can chew.
5.5 5.0 1870 32.6 -

SQ5 Sportback TDI Quattro ★★★★★ 3.8.22
Not the sharpest fast SUV, but the real-world appeal is clear to see.
5.1 4.6 2023 49.0 -

Q6 E-tron Quattro Edition 1 ★★★★★ 2.10.24
EV is hard to love, easier to recommend, with good dynamics and strong EV credentials.
5.3 4.3 - 2.8 247

Q7 3.0 TDI Quattro S Line ★★★★★ 12.8.15
Chiselled, plush, suave and spacious. Only so-so to drive, though.
6.2 6.2 2245 - -

SQ7 4.0 TDI Quattro ★★★★★ 26.10.16
A class-topping blend of superlative comfort and usable performance.
5.1 4.5 2330 37.9 -

Q8 50 TDI S Line ★★★★★ 26.9.18
Striking and effective SUV-coupé leaves us wanting more.
6.9 6.7 2285 40.1 -

R8 V10 Plus ★★★★★ 30.12.15
Supercar grips and goes even harder but wants for its predecessor's delicacy.
3.1 2.6 1730 - -

BENTLEY

Bentayga W12 ★★★★★ 18.5.16
Versatile, genteel, luxurious SUV with a silken sporting edge.
4.9 4.4 2440 - -

Bentayga EWB Mulliner Blackline ★★★★★ 24.4.24
Stretched SUV lacks the Mulsanne limo's charm but is a better luxury car by far.
4.4 3.8 2600 25.6 -

Continental GT W12 First Edition ★★★★★ 2.5.18
Superb luxury coupé has added dynamism but not enough to top the class.
3.6 2.9 2295 26.4 -

Continental GT Speed ★★★★★ 22.12.21
Remains a wonderful grand tourer but can fall short as an entertainer.
3.4 2.7 2279 22.0 -

Continental GTC V8 S ★★★★★ 19.4.23
Sporty V8 execution adds vivacity to a car that makes you feel good.
3.6 3.2 2295 29.1 -

Flying Spur W12 ★★★★★ 15.7.20
Trounces rivals for driver appeal but not in every way that matters.
3.9 3.2 2500 32.5 -

Flying Spur Hybrid Mulliner ★★★★★ 17.8.22
Mightily convincing PHEV limo more than earns its Bentley wings.
4.4 3.9 2596 30.1 28

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
BMW				
120 M Sport ★★★★★				31.12.24
Credible and complete junior BMW still lacks distinguishing driver appeal.				
7.3	6.8	1489	45.8	-
218i M Sport Gran Coupé				8.4.20
★★★★★ Junior Gran Coupé hits some high notes but fails to inspire.				
8.8	8.4	1375	58.2	-
220i M Sport Coupé ★★★★★				1.6.22
A good coupé rather than a great sports car.				
7.3	7.3	1546	46.8	-
M2 Coupé Manual ★★★★★				12.7.23
Junior M car takes huge objective leaps but smaller subjective ones.				
4.5	3.8	1687	32.1	-
320d M Sport Auto ★★★★★				15.5.19
BMW's one-time default-choice executive saloon hits even greater heights.				
6.9	6.8	1639	63.3	-
330d xDrive M Sport Plus Edition Touring ★★★★★				15.1.20
An estate that's powerful, classy and great to drive – but with a price to match.				
5.5	5.2	1922	52.6	-
330e M Sport ★★★★★				1.7.20
Slicker and sweeter-handling than the average PHEV. A true 3 Series.				
-	-	1740	-	-
M440i xDrive ★★★★★				6.1.21
A rounded, engaging and potent coupé let down only by its looks.				
4.1	3.7	1775	44.0	-
M4 Competition ★★★★★				21.4.21
A very modern M car and a brilliantly versatile and enjoyable one.				
3.9	2.9	1800	32.7	-
i4 M50 ★★★★★				19.1.22
Fast, refined and with lots of traditional appeal to convert sceptics.				
4.1	3.2	2248	-	186
M4 CSL ★★★★★				16.11.22
A next-level M car, with the more complex temperament to match.				
3.6	2.7	1625	31.1	-
M5 ★★★★★				29.1.25
A technical leap, but one born more out of necessity than inspiration.				
3.5	2.8	2373	27.3	35
i5 eDrive40 M Sport Pro ★★★★★				29.11.23
Has dynamic appeal but less convincing than BMW's other EV saloons.				
5.4	4.4	2213	-	235
550e xDrive M Sport Pro				3.4.24
★★★★★ Undeniably capable and a fine plug-in hybrid sports saloon.				
4.4	3.5	2232	40.1	47
i7 xDrive60 M Sport ★★★★★				15.2.23
It has taken huge strides as a luxury car – and still drives like a BMW.				
4.5	3.4	2758	-	264
840d xDrive ★★★★★				16.1.19
A likeable big GT, albeit not the most luxurious or rewarding on sale.				
5.0	4.6	1901	49.2	-
M8 Competition Convertible				5.2.20
★★★★★ Has attitude to spare but isn't the complete super-GT.				
3.3	2.7	2020	31.6	-

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
M8 Competition ★★★★★				
3.6.20 Highly capable but doesn't truly satisfy as either a sports car or a GT.				
-	-	1960	-	-
X1 xDrive23i M Sport ★★★★★				25.1.23
A decent family crossover but a poor BMW.				
6.4	6.0	1800	45.6	-
X4 M Competition ★★★★★				13.11.19
Fast and precise, if short on the big-time charisma that you would expect.				
4.0	3.3	2028	29.0	-
X5 xDrive30d M Sport ★★★★★				2.1.19
Better to drive than the SUV norm but not better across the board.				
6.6	6.6	2279	43.1	-
X6 M Competition ★★★★★				20.3.24
Unyielding performance focus makes for a fast but compromised SUV.				
3.5	3.1	2442	29.3	-
X7 M50i M Performance xDrive				9.9.20
★★★★★ Stunningly large and enviably refined but too excessive for many.				
4.8	3.9	2583	30.5	-
X7 M60i xDrive ★★★★★				29.3.23
Uncompromising-looking X7 is seriously fast but laudably refined.				
4.2	3.7	2600	28.9	-
iX xDrive50 M Sport ★★★★★				2.3.22
Takes the luxury EV to elevated heights, but its design is easy to criticise.				
4.4	3.4	2593	-	252
Z4 M40i with Handschalter Pack				21.8.24
★★★★★ Manual gearbox gives six-year-old roadster new depth.				
5.7	5.9	1561	36.9	-
BMW ALPINA				
B3 GT Touring ★★★★★				15.1.25
Last-dance B3 has mighty breadth and will go down as one of the all-time greats.				
3.3	2.7	1910	29.4	-
B8 Gran Coupé ★★★★★				22.9.21
Superbly rounded but lacking some dynamism implied by its looks.				
3.5	2.8	2100	-	-
BYD				
Atto 3 Design ★★★★★				31.5.23
Lack of attention to detail detracts from the impressive battery tech.				
7.0	6.2	1787	-	201
Seal Design ★★★★★				17.1.24
Frustrating software lets down the mostly impressive hardware.				
5.8	4.7	2116	-	279
CATERHAM				
Seven160 ★★★★★				20.11.13
Fun entry-level version of B-road toy smacks just a little of compromise.				
8.4	8.7	510	44.8	-
Seven 620S ★★★★★				9.3.16
Supplies fun intravenously with a mix of freneticism and road-going usability.				
3.8	4.2	650	29.5	-
Seven 420 Cup ★★★★★				31.8.22
Track-day variant serves up sensational driving thrills – for a price.				
4.2	3.4	560	35.3	-

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
CHEVROLET				
Corvette 3LT ★★★★★				22.6.22
Big step up for charismatic, usable and temptingly priced American icon.				
3.9	3.2	1679	32.9	-
Corvette Z06 3LZ ★★★★★				16.8.23
Incredible engine and chassis makeover, but the price has to be right.				
3.1	2.4	1670	26.1	-
CITROEN				
Ami Colour ★★★★★				11.1.23
Cleverly conceived but hard to recommend, given its limited capabilities.				
-	-	471	-	39
C3 Puretech 110 Flair ★★★★★				28.12.16
Dynamically challenged, but a cheery design makes this supermini interesting.				
9.6	9.4	1050	62.3	-
C3 Aircross Puretech 110 Flair				7.3.18
★★★★★ Practical small crossover isn't outstanding to drive but is likeable nonetheless.				
11.5	10.7	1159	39.5	-
C4 Puretech 130 Shine Plus Auto				26.5.21
★★★★★ Has rational and irrational appeal but lacks a fine-tuned execution.				
9.5	9.2	1320	56.4	-
ë-C4 X Shine ★★★★★				3.5.23
EV motoring done differently, with value, but its successes are qualified.				
9.7	8.8	1623	-	162
C5 Aircross BlueHdi 180 Flair Plus				13.2.19
★★★★★ Attractive and interesting, although its style is better than its substance.				
9.0	8.5	1540	47.8	-
C5 X Puretech 180 Shine Plus				28.9.22
★★★★★ Good value and comfy, this is the kind of car that Citroën should be making.				
7.8	7.1	1502	47.8	-
CUPRA				
Born 204PS 58kWh V3 ★★★★★				6.7.22
As good as the family hatchback EV class gets in places but not as good as it could be.				
6.7	6.2	1794	-	220
Born VZ First Edition ★★★★★				9.10.24
An already fine electric car's driver appeal is lifted but not transformed.				
5.4	4.2	1996	3.5	269
Leon Estate 310PS VZ3 ★★★★★				8.9.21
Fiercely quick and dependable but pulls the heartstrings only lightly.				
4.9	4.3	1707	40.1	-
Leon 2.0 TSI 245PS VZ2 ★★★★★				27.7.22
Brilliantly rounded hot hatch shines in its simplest spec.				
5.9	4.7	1468	43.4	-
Ateca 2.0 TSI 4Drive DSG ★★★★★				23.1.19
Hot crossover is objectively impressive but lacks true driver reward.				
4.9	4.4	1615	36.7	-
Formentor 2.0 TSI 4Drive VZ2 DSG				3.2.21
★★★★★ Versatile, interesting, rewarding. One of the best fast crossovers yet.				
5.1	4.3	1583	36.4	-
Tavascan V1 ★★★★★				5.2.25
Electric SUV is competent but not very compelling or memorable.				
6.0	5.0	2129	3.2	246

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
DACIA				
Sandero Stepway TCe 90 Prestige				28.4.21
★★★★★ Cut-price crossover is compromised in surprisingly few areas.				
11.9	11.9	1096	54.1	-
Duster SCe 115 4x2 Comfort				22.8.18
★★★★★ Comfortable, simple SUV keeps its budget family motoring star quality.				
13.1	12.6	1286	42.2	-
Duster Hybrid 140 Journey				27.11.24
★★★★★ Notably improved yet barely any pricier.				
9.7	8.7	1413	40.2	-
Jogger TCe 110 Comfort ★★★★★				20.4.22
Superb versatility, outstanding value and so likeable with it.				
11.0	11.0	1267	48.5	-
DS				
3 Crossback Puretech 155 Prestige				10.7.19
★★★★★ No design smash hit. Short on perceived quality and dynamic polish.				
8.8	8.3	1205	48.6	-
4 E-Tense 225 Performance Line+				29.6.22
★★★★★ High price and a list of niggles keep this family hatchback away from the top.				
7.4	6.0	1706	44.7	26
7 Crossback Puretech 225 Prestige				19.9.18
★★★★★ DS's first SUV is a competent but slightly bland addition to the class.				
8.6	7.0	1616	44.6	-
7 E-Tense 4x4 360 La Première				26.4.23
★★★★★ More focused and makes subtle gains, but its powertrain and ride frustrate.				
5.7	4.6	1956	36.6	29
9 E-Tense 225 Performance Line Plus				2.2.22
★★★★★ Posh saloon is alternative and devoted to its luxury remit but no show-stopper.				
8.6	7.1	1886	44.7	20
FERRARI				
296 GTB ★★★★★				21.12.22
Stellar modern-era Ferrari supercar has an unrivalled breadth of talent.				
2.7	1.9	1648	37.8	15
SF90 Stradale ★★★★★				3.11.21
Sets the performance benchmark but isn't a track-handling great.				
2.5	1.8	1698	24.4	16
FIAT				
Panda 1.2 Easy ★★★★★				25.4.12
Was everything a city car ought to be but is now way past its prime.				
14.6	15.6	1020	49.1	-
Panda 4x4 Twinair ★★★★★				17.4.13
A lovable four-wheel-drive miniature that trades space for style and charm.				
14.6	15.8	1195	44.2	-
500 1.4 Lounge ★★★★★				19.9.07
Enjoyable city car with the substance to back up its style.				
10.3	10.4	1065	42.8	-
500C 1.2 Pop ★★★★★				5.8.09
Landaulet hits the spot every bit as well as the regular hatchback and is often better.				
13.2	14.4	1035	48.3	-

0-60mph
30-70mph
Kerb weight
Touring economy
Electric range

500Twinair Lounge ★★★★★ 24.11.10
Characterful and stylish, but its real-world economy lets it down.
11.7 13.0 1070 42.1 -

500e 42kWh Icon ★★★★★ 26.1.22
More than just an electric city car and a welcome return to form.
8.1 7.7 1365 - 142

600e La Prima ★★★★★ 27.3.24
Electric crossover is decent value and easy to drive but otherwise a bit easy to overlook.
8.8 7.7 1587 - 173

FORD

Fiesta 1.0 EcoBoost 125PS Titanium ★★★★★ 9.8.17
A dynamically brilliant supermini but no longer the best one.
6.6 7.8 1218 48.2 -

Fiesta ST ★★★★★ 15.8.18
Great to drive and supreme value but not better than before in all aspects.
6.6 7.8 1218 48.2 -

Focus 1.5 EcoBoost 182PS ST-Line X ★★★★★ 20.2.19
Better to drive and look at than before and impressively good value.
8.9 7.8 1417 43.8 -

Focus ST ★★★★★ 11.9.19
Big on character and performance but not quite truly immersive.
6.1 4.9 1433 40.7 -

Puma 1.0T 125PS MHEV Titanium ★★★★★ 25.3.20
The driver's car the compact crossover class has been crying out for and more besides.
10.0 9.6 1260 50.0 -

Puma ST ★★★★★ 24.3.21
Well judged, versatile and fun. The jacked-up hot hatch done well.
7.2 6.2 1301 41.5 -

Explorer Extended Range Premium RWD ★★★★★ 23.10.24
Electric family crossover is better to drive than rivals, but at a cost.
5.8 4.8 2067 2.9 262

Kuga 2.5 PHEV ST-Line ★★★★★ 24.6.20
Good value and potentially frugal, but this SUV has more to give.
- - 1844 - -

Mustang Mach-E Extended Range RWD ★★★★★ 23.6.21
Worthy of the name? Perhaps not, but it's still impressive and likeable.
6.8 5.6 2130 - -

Mustang Mach-EGT AWD ★★★★★ 27.4.22
Has its moments but lacks the dynamism of a typical fast Ford.
4.2 3.5 2298 - -

Mustang Dark Horse ★★★★★ 20.11.24
Brimming with character but more compromised than many of its forebears.
4.5 3.5 1853 26.1 -

Tourneo Courier 1.0 EcoBoost Titanium ★★★★★ 10.7.24
Has some Ford-typical star quality but not enough for the money.
10.8 10.6 1426 47.4 -

0-60mph
30-70mph
Kerb weight
Touring economy
Electric range

Transit Custom L2H1 320 2.0 EcoBlue 150PS Limited ★★★★★ 8.5.24
Likely to remain the default commercial vehicle, despite a high price.
12.1 11.8 1971 38.8 -

Ranger 2.0TD EcoBlue 205PS Wildtrak ★★★★★ 14.6.23
Pick-up truck is practical, car-like to drive and generally hard to fault.
9.8 9.9 2348 36.6 -

F-150 Lightning Platinum ★★★★★ 17.5.23
Electric truck has huge utility and appealing range, but its size and price will put many off.
4.5 3.7 3121 - 288

GENESIS

G70 2.2 CRDi Luxury Line ★★★★★ 10.11.21
Likeable left-field choice struggles to threaten the establishment.
7.2 6.7 1751 60.4 -

Electrified G80 ★★★★★ 12.10.22
Electric limo doesn't quite hit the mark like its Kia and Hyundai platform-mates.
4.4 4.0 2349 - 272

GV60 Sport Plus ★★★★★ 24.8.22
Handsome, fast, sophisticated electric crossover is the best Genesis yet.
3.8 3.1 2192 - 220

GV80 3.0D Luxury 5-Seater ★★★★★ 15.9.21
Rich, spacious and comfortable but not a world-class luxury SUV yet.
6.7 6.6 2217 45.0 -

GWM ORA

Funky Cat 48kWh First Edition ★★★★★ 1.2.23
Electric hatch is decent value and has funky looks but is a mediocre experience overall.
7.7 7.2 1580 - 154

HONDA

E Advance ★★★★★ 26.8.20
More than just a pretty face in the EV crowd but its limited range is an issue.
7.9 - 1535 - 110

Jazz 1.5 i-MMD Hybrid EX ★★★★★ 7.10.20
Eminently practical, impressively frugal and pretty joyless to drive.
9.6 10.0 1248 57.0 -

Civic Type R GT ★★★★★ 25.10.17
Hot hatch is a sheer delight for enthusiast drivers and their bank balances.
5.7 7.1 1400 57.0 -

HR-V e:HEV Advance Style ★★★★★ 24.11.21
Fine ergonomics and big on superficial charm but leaves us cold.
9.2 9.3 1397 43.2 -

e:Ny1 Advance ★★★★★ 1.11.23
EV is charming in some ways but has too little substance to justify the price.
8.6 6.9 1756 - 211

HYUNDAI

i10 1.2 MPI Premium ★★★★★ 15.4.20
Smallest Hyundai regains leadership of the city car class.
12.3 12.9 999 52.5 -

i20 1.0 T-GDi 100 48V SE Connect ★★★★★ 24.2.21
Steady gains for a versatile runabout still lacking some personality.
9.7 10.1 1065 63.5 -

0-60mph
30-70mph
Kerb weight
Touring economy
Electric range

i20 N ★★★★★ 25.8.21
N division's finest car to date. A serious hot hatch with real dynamic polish.
6.1 5.4 1231 50.6 -

i30 Tourer 1.4 T-GDi Premium SE ★★★★★ 13.9.17
Competent, servile, inoffensive-looking family estate offers little to like or dislike.
9.5 9.7 1425 48.9 -

i30 N Performance ★★★★★ 28.12.17
Hyundai's first hot hatch attempt is fast and full-blooded with rough edges.
6.4 5.6 1478 43.1 -

Ioniq 6 RWD Ultimate ★★★★★ 7.6.23
Usable, rangy and innovative EV let down by cabin packaging and ride.
7.2 6.2 2006 - 272

Kona 1.0 120PS Advance ★★★★★ 6.9.23
Hyundai brings some cheer, value and space to the compact crossover class.
10.4 10.3 1352 50.4 -

Tucson 1.6 T-GDi Hybrid Premium ★★★★★ 17.3.21
Tucson shows that Hyundai can do both style and substance.
7.6 6.2 1612 47.7 -

Ioniq 5 N ★★★★★ 7.8.24
A little big and heavy, but compelling like no other EV to date.
3.5 2.7 2221 - 224

Santa Fe Hybrid 4WD Premium ★★★★★ 16.10.24
A superb lounge on wheels, but let down by its powertrain.
7.9 7.5 2007 32.9 -

Nexo ★★★★★ 12.6.19
Impressive effort that heads in the right direction for hydrogen fuel cell cars.
9.6 9.7 1852 - -

INEOS

Grenadier 3.0 T Fieldmaster ★★★★★ 20.9.23
Unquestionably a serious proposition but maybe lacking in innovation.
8.0 8.1 2682 20.9 -

JAGUAR

XE 2.0 200PS R-Sport ★★★★★ 1.7.15
Junior saloon hits the spot, matching the best of its German rivals at their own game.
7.6 6.7 1530 48.7 -

XF Sportbrake 300PS R-Sport AWD ★★★★★ 17.4.19
Estate is built on enthusiast values but in need of a wider update.
6.6 6.2 1727 36.8 -

E-Pace D180 AWD SE ★★★★★ 11.4.18
Misses the mark for keen drivers but is a desirable SUV nevertheless.
9.9 10.5 1768 49.2 -

I-Pace EV400 S ★★★★★ 12.9.18
Jaguar's landmark car strikes a heavy blow to Tesla's luxury EV monopoly.
4.5 3.5 2236 - -

F-Pace SVR ★★★★★ 24.7.19
Broad-batted and can vividly thrill but hasn't forgotten its SUV roots.
4.1 3.5 2070 29.4 -

F-Pace 400e R-Dynamic HSE ★★★★★ 1.12.21
Facelift hits the mark. Electrification is a mixed but creditable success.
5.1 4.6 2264 - 24

0-60mph
30-70mph
Kerb weight
Touring economy
Electric range

F-Type V8 S Convertible ★★★★★ 12.6.13
As good to drive as it is to behold - but at a material and financial cost.
4.0 3.4 1810 28.5 -

F-Type 2.0 R-Dynamic Coupé ★★★★★ 22.11.17
Plenty of driver appeal, but its cracking chassis merits a better engine.
5.7 5.1 1640 43.6 -

F-Type P575 R AWD Coupé ★★★★★ 29.4.20
The same likeable bruiser behind those prettier features.
- - 1743 - -

JEEP

Avenger Electric Summit ★★★★★ 24.1.24
Not perfect but successfully takes Jeep in a fresh direction.
8.3 6.9 1601 - 172

Compass 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited ★★★★★ 3.10.18
Pricey, pokey, gruff Jeep is a long shot for SUV market success.
11.0 11.5 1540 44.8 -

Compass 4xe S ★★★★★ 16.2.22
Not without niche appeal but off the pace in too many respects.
6.4 5.7 1872 46.9 22

Renegade 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited ★★★★★ 28.10.15
Charmingly authentic but also pricey and rather rough and ready.
10.8 11.2 1502 52.6 -

TOP 3

BEST FAMILY CARS



1 BMW 3 Series Touring



2 Dacia Jogger



3 Volkswagen Golf

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10



Road tests revisited



1993 WESTFIELD ZE1

First kit car approved for sale in fully built form comes not from stalwart Caterham but nascent Dudley firm, following various changes. Handling, ride quality and performance of Ford Zeta engine impress but it suffers from poor attention to detail and is pricier than a Seven.

Price £16,815
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1796cc, petrol
Power 128bhp at 6250rpm
Torque 119lb ft at 4250rpm
Weight 680kg
0-60mph 7.0sec
0-90mph 18.7sec
Top speed 107mph
Economy 26.6mpg



1952 ALLARD K2

Latest iteration of British-made, American-powered sports car gets a huge power boost from a Mercury V8 upgraded by Belgian tuner Arden. "A car for the driver who likes his motoring 'in the raw' and who wants a car that must really be driven, and one that in return gives results."

Price £1868
Engine V8, 3917cc, petrol
Power 140bhp at 4000rpm
Torque 225lb ft at 2500rpm
Weight 1398kg
0-60mph 11.6sec
0-90mph 27.5sec
Top speed 102mph
Economy 12.3mpg

READ FULL ROAD
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0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

Renegade 4xe Trailhawk

★★★★☆ 30.6.21
Electrified Jeep has some charm but is typically rough and ready.
6.7 5.6 1816 39.4 21

Wrangler 2.2 Multijet II Overland

★★★★☆ 10.4.19
Off-road icon is now more competent on it.
9.0 9.1 2122 37.6 -

KGM

Tivoli XLV ELX Auto ★★★★★ 14.9.16

Practical, well-priced crossover is competent but far from compelling.
12.0 12.6 1469 - -

KIA

Picanto 1.0 MPI 2 ★★★★★ 11.9.24

No great advance for the breed but likeable, capable and still here.
13.4 13.9 985 51.4 -

Ceed 1.6 CRDi 115bhp 2 ★★★★★ 29.8.18

Big step up in the family hatchback class is a watershed moment for Kia.
9.9 9.6 1411 70.3 -

Proceed 1.4 T-GDi GT-Line S

★★★★☆ 27.2.19
Alluring and interesting but not quite as special to drive as it looks.
9.5 8.9 1475 42.6 -

Xceed 1.4 T-GDi First Edition

★★★★☆ 20.11.19
Looks good and drives well but lacks some practicality and polish.
9.3 8.7 1452 46.8 -

Soul EV Urban ★★★★★ 5.7.23

Not actually that cheap but likeable and complete.
8.0 8.3 1569 - 147

Niro EV 3 ★★★★★ 7.9.22

A good family EV made better, despite some missed opportunities.
6.9 5.6 1739 - 246

EV3 81.4kWh GT-Line ★★★★★ 31.12.24

New-era Niro is rationally compelling but not a game-changer.
7.2 6.4 1858 2.6 265

Sportage 1.6 HEV 2WD GT-Line S

★★★★☆ 15.6.22
Bold family SUV catches the eye but won't hold your interest to drive.
7.3 6.4 1658 44.8 -

EV6 77.4kWh RWD GT-Line S

★★★★☆ 9.10.24
Not the outstanding EV it once was but still a likeably bold choice.
7.5 6.3 - 2.9 227

EV6 GT ★★★★★ 4.10.23

Lots of pace and usability for the money but not enough driver appeal.
3.6 2.7 2161 - 209

Sorento 1.6 HEV T-GDi AWD 2

★★★★☆ 20.1.21
Lacks polish, but its abundant utility appeal and value shine through.
8.5 7.9 2006 43.3 -

EV9 GT-Line S ★★★★★ 31.1.24

Style, space, versatility and range for a more reasonable price than rivals.
5.1 4.6 2660 - 220

LAMBORGHINI

Huracán Performante ★★★★★ 11.10.17

Breathtaking track makeover brings it close to greatness.
2.9 2.0 1590 22.4 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

Huracán Evo RWD ★★★★★ 20.5.20

Finest driver's car Lamborghini makes is also the most attainable.
- - 1389 - -

Revuelto ★★★★★

4.12.24
New-era V12 Lamborghini is an extraordinary statement of intent.
2.5 1.7 1960 24.1 6

Urus ★★★★★

3.7.19
Italy's latest 'mostro' has a driving experience to blow your mind.
3.3 2.8 2285 28.5 -

LAND ROVER

Range Rover Evoque P300e

R-Dynamic HSE ★★★★★ 10.2.21
A better plug-in compact SUV. Expensive but slick and luxurious.
6.8 5.9 2158 32.7 24

Discovery Sport D180 AWD SE

★★★★☆ 8.1.20
Off-road fidelity and character outweigh a lacklustre powertrain.
10.3 10.5 2145 47.5 -

Discovery TD6 HSE Luxury

★★★★☆ 12.4.17
A proper Land Rover, modernised, refined and as likeable as ever.
8.7 8.8 2230 - -

Range Rover Velar D240 HSE

★★★★☆ 30.8.17
Stylish, advanced and accomplished but in need of a better powertrain.
9.3 9.0 2089 48.2 -

Defender 110 P400 X ★★★★★ 13.5.20

World-class capability. Brilliant on and off road – at a price.
- - 2388 - -

Range Rover Sport D300 Dynamic SE

★★★★☆ 2.11.22
Deeply appealing and deeply accomplished, with a price to match.
7.2 6.6 2511 42.5 -

Range Rover Sport SV Edition One

★★★★☆ 28.8.24
More capable than most rivals, but others are more compelling.
3.9 5.1 2546 28.9 -

Range Rover D350 HSE ★★★★★ 13.7.22

A fantastically well-isolated luxury car and fully paid-up capable 4x4.
6.3 6.0 2667 35.9 -

LEXUS

LBX FWD Premium Plus Design

★★★★☆ 29.5.24
Crossover convinces as a small premium car, but only just.
8.4 8.4 1306 45.2 -

NX 350h AWD Premium Plus Pack

★★★★☆ 16.3.22
Interesting, refined and efficient, but not as polished as the best.
7.1 6.7 1812 44.7 -

RX 500h F Sport ★★★★★

22.3.23
Classy and luxurious, but that might not be enough for keener drivers.
6.1 5.5 2088 31.7 -

ES 300h Takumi ★★★★★

6.2.19
Boldly styled, economical saloon has a singularly rational but dry character.
8.7 7.6 1742 48.8 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

LS 500h Premier ★★★★★

6.6.18
Limo has never been more appealing or less competitive in key areas.
5.9 5.3 2404 42.2 -

RC F Ultimate Edition ★★★★★

6.11.24
Bellows in some ways, whispers in others. A little flawed but never dull or boring.
4.7 3.8 1733 30.1 -

LM 350h AWD Takumi ★★★★★

7.2.24
MPV is a fascinating luxury-market curio but no threat to the old-school limo.
8.6 8.2 2368 40.5 -

LOTUS

Eletre R ★★★★★

24.7.24
There's plenty to like about the new Lotus but little sign of the old Lotus.
3.1 2.2 2682 - 216

MASERATI

Ghibli Diesel ★★★★★

12.3.14
Saloon isn't lacking in style but is a little short on substance.
6.5 6.0 2040 40.4 -

Grecale Trofeo ★★★★★

18.10.23
A belting engine but high-priced and not the best-driving Grecale.
3.6 3.2 2097 33.6 -

Levante Diesel ★★★★★

30.11.16
A mildly interesting also-ran, with a weak engine and so-so handling.
6.8 6.9 2205 41.5 -

Levante S Granlusso ★★★★★

8.5.19
Better engine improves the class's curate's egg but can't redeem it.
5.1 4.5 2232 23.7 -

Granturismo Trofeo ★★★★★ 11.9.24

An appealing grand tourer that lacks some sophistication for the price.
3.6 3.1 - 33.0 -

Granturismo Folgore ★★★★★ 26.2.25

Assured and likeable but could only ever be bought with the heart – even sans V8.
2.9 2.3 2358 2.3 183

MC20 Cielo ★★★★★

16.10.24
Dynamic iconoclast, old-school charmer, occasional GT. A unique supercar.
4.0 2.8 1783 29.6 -

MAZDA

21.5 Skyactiv-G 90PS SE-L Nav

★★★★☆ 22.4.15
The go-to option for keen drivers is also a convincing all-rounder.
10.4 11.0 1050 - -

32.0 Skyactiv-X 181PS GT Sport

★★★★☆ 6.11.19
Sweet to drive and great to behold, but the Skyactiv-X engine is no knockout.
9.1 9.1 1425 57.0 -

MX-30 145PS GT Sport Tech

★★★★☆ 10.3.21
Has smart looks and a plush interior, but the first Mazda EV deserved more.
9.1 8.6 1663 - -

CX-30 2.5 e-Skyactiv G

Exclusive-Line ★★★★★ 19.2.25
Alternative powertrain is a credit to this voluble, unconventional compact SUV.
7.6 7.6 1422 45.2 -

CX-5 2.2D 150PS 2WD Sport Nav

★★★★☆ 28.6.17
Still moderately left of field but now likeable in greater proportions.
9.4 9.2 1620 53.9 -

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
CX-60 e-Skyactiv D 3.3 RWD					
Exclusive-Line ★★★★★					10.5.23
Old-school in all the best ways, but the ride is difficult to overlook.					
7.6	7.2	1893	52.3	-	
MX-51.5 SE-L Nav ★★★★★					
An outstanding and usable sports car at an outstanding price.					
8.4	7.9	1050	-	-	
McLAREN					
720S ★★★★★					
Sufficiently complete and exciting to dominate rivals and hugely fast.					
2.9	2.0	1419	24.2	-	
750S ★★★★★					
McLaren's mainstay is a bit of a wild child – at times, to its own cost.					
2.9	2.0	1412	28.8	-	
Artura ★★★★★					
Brilliantly packaged, invitingly poised and wise use of electrification.					
3.2	2.1	1552	32.9	17	
Artura Spider ★★★★★					
Artura finds extra form in convertible guise.					
3.1	2.2	1618	27.2	17	
GT ★★★★★					
Plenty of pace and purity, less GT-typical usability and refinement.					
3.3	2.3	1580	34.2		
MERCEDES-AMG					
A45 S 4Matic+ Plus ★★★★★					
AMG brings its hottest hatch yet to life without harming usability.					
4.1	3.3	1661	41.5	-	
C63 SE Performance 4Matic+ Night Edition Premium Plus Estate ★★★★★					
Fascinating engineering feat falls flat as an exciting super-estate.					
3.3	2.8	2217	27.1	7.1	
GT 63 4Matic+ 4-Door Coupé ★★★★★					
AMG defies physics with a four-door GT that handles beautifully.					
3.3	2.7	2135	30.1	-	
GT 63 SE Performance 4-Door Coupé ★★★★★					
Rocket-ship GT with astonishing powertrain but still lacks driver reward.					
2.9	2.5	2339	23.9	6	
EQS 53 4Matic+ Night Edition ★★★★★					
Good but doesn't quite live up to its spectacular on-paper potential.					
3.6	2.8	2673	-	259	
S63 E Performance Night Edition ★★★★★					
Prodigiously quick, confoundingly slick in its handling, but has a coarseness to it.					
3.5	2.7	2666	26.1	-	
GLE 53 4Matic+ Premium Plus ★★★★★					
Remarkable dynamic versatility but lacks some driver appeal.					
5.4	4.9	2471	29.4	-	
SL 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus ★★★★★					
Stonking V8 doesn't quite redeem a car of as many sacrifices as gains.					
3.5	2.8	1939	26.2	-	

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
GT 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus Coupé ★★★★★					
Fearsomely quick and truly usable but less lovable than before.					
3.1	2.7	1972	30.7	-	
MERCEDES-BENZ					
A200 Sport ★★★★★					
Luxurious and desirable but not good enough to drive to take top spot.					
8.7	7.9	1375	56.7	-	
A200 AMG Line Executive ★★★★★					
Significant progress for a keen-handling and efficient premium hatch.					
7.8	7.3	1396	59.3	-	
A250e AMG Line Premium ★★★★★					
Falls some way short of a rounded 'premium' driving experience.					
6.7	5.4	1665	57.8	-	
B180 Sport ★★★★★					
In an ever-shrinking niche, this compact MPV deserves consideration.					
8.4	8.3	1405	51.3	-	
CLA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★★★					
Nearer the mark to look at but still way wide of it as a driver's car.					
6.8	6.1	1555	48.3	-	
C300e AMG Line ★★★★★					
Long-range hybrid tech gives C-Class an outstanding selling point.					
5.8	5.1	2005	49.0	48	
E220d AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★★★					
An effective blend of convention, comfort, luxury and modernity.					
7.2	5.9	1917	65.8	-	
EQE 350+ AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★★★					
Hot on comfort and tech but lacklustre on range, material quality and space.					
6.0	5.5	2386	-	262	
EQS 450 Business Class SUV ★★★★★					
Ultra-luxurious seven-seater strays confusingly into MPV territory.					
5.5	5.2	2899	-	265	
S580e L AMG Line Premium Plus Executive ★★★★★					
Plug-in S-Class is the best of an otherwise ordinary generation.					
5.2	4.2	2530	37.0	45	
EQA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★★★					
Competent but entirely average. For the money, we expect better.					
8.4	7.6	2030	-	200	
GLB 220d 4Matic AMG Line Premium ★★★★★					
Smart looking and practical but its identity feels stretched at times.					
7.4	7.1	1810	55.4	-	
EQB 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium ★★★★★					
A versatile premium EV that doesn't easily command its premium.					
7.7	6.8	2235	-	-	
GLC 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★★★					
Shines in places but doesn't notably elevate the GLC proposition.					
6.5	6.0	1929	41.2	-	

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
GLS 400d 4Matic AMG Line Premium ★★★★★					
Has much to commend it but not enough to be the S-Class of SUVs.					
6.5	6.0	2634	38.2	-	
G350d AMG Line ★★★★★					
Customary capability, charm and ego, now with 21st-century luxury.					
7.5	7.2	2451	31.3	-	
G500 AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★★★					
Anachronistic, iconoclastic and expensive but very hard not to love.					
5.1	4.5	-	30.7	-	
CLE 300e AMG Line Premium Plus Coupé ★★★★★					
Electrification brings traditional Merc strengths to a desirable mid-sized coupé.					
6.1	5.5	2122	37.1	49	
MG					
3 Hybrid+ Trophy ★★★★★					
Good value and with no serious vices but still lacks a final layer of polish.					
6.8	6.2	1311	47.9	-	
4 EV Long Range SE ★★★★★					
Good value, useful and fun to drive to boot.					
7.1	6.1	1692	-	185	
5 SW EV Exclusive ★★★★★					
MG's second EV does cheap motoring much better than the first.					
8.0	7.1	1538	-	161	
ZS EV Exclusive ★★★★★					
Practical, affordable MG fails to truly move the game on.					
8.9	8.0	1556	-	113	
ZS Hybrid+ Trophy ★★★★★					
Roomier, cleverer and better-equipped than you would expect for the money.					
7.6	6.6	1422	41.5	-	
MINI					
Countryman C Exclusive ★★★★★					
Spacious but sends mixed messages on family-friendly refinement.					
8.7	7.7	1618	46.9	-	
Aceman SE Exclusive ★★★★★					
Compact SUV has the usual Mini charm but limited extra grown-up appeal.					
6.8	5.7	1756	3.1	162	
MORGAN					
Plus Four ★★★★★					
Refreshing and fun in that true Morgan way but lacks a little polish.					
5.1	4.3	1013	54.0	-	
Plus Six ★★★★★					
The individualist's sports car made better.					
4.4	3.3	1188	37.2	-	
Super 3 ★★★★★					
Adds some subtle modernity to the 3 Wheeler's endless giggles.					
6.9	5.9	644	43.5	-	
NISSAN					
Juke 1.0 DIG-T 117 Tekna ★★★★★					
Impressive in some respects but outstanding in few.					
11.9	11.8	1256	46.0	-	
Qashqai 1.3 DIG-T 158 Tekna ★★★★★					
Ticks the important family car boxes but its powertrain frustrates.					
10.0	9.3	1412	44.9	-	

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ariya 87kWh Evolve ★★★★★					
Surprisingly traditional and luxurious but not wholly successful.					
8.2	6.4	2109	-	-	
X-Trail e-Power e-4orce AWD Tekna ★★★★★					
Capable all-rounder that deals effortlessly with everyday life.					
6.6	6.0	1947	33.8	-	
OMODA					
5 1.6 TGD Comfort ★★★★★					
Chinese SUV has some promise as a purely rational buy but feels under-developed.					
7.4	6.3	1474	38.2	-	
PEUGEOT					
e-208 Allure Premium ★★★★★					
Stylish, drivable, usable, reasonably priced – and the best small EV					
-	-	1455	38.2	-	
308 1.2T Puretech 130 GT ★★★★★					
A reminder of the old Peugeot magic. Small, supple and a bit special.					
9.5	9.2	1358	55.3	-	
408 Hybrid 180 GT e-EAT8 ★★★★★					
Novel Peugeot shows an alternative path for the family car.					
8.2	7.3	1746	42.1	40	
508 BlueHdi 180 S&S GT Auto ★★★★★					
Stylish and likeable but lacking the polish of more premium rivals.					
8.8	8.5	1671	52.0	-	

TOP 3

BEST LUXURY SUVs



1 Range Rover Sport



2 Porsche Cayenne



3 BMW X5

SCAN THE
CODE TO SEE
THE TOP 10



0-60mph
30-70mph
Kerb weight
Touring economy
Electric range

508 SW Hybrid 225 S&S Allure e-EAT8
★★★★☆ 8.7.20
This is a comfortable car that looks smart and feels classy.

5.7 4.7 1892 44.0 -

508 SW Hybrid 4 PSE ★★★★★ 5.5.21
Hits notable handling highs but feels less than sharp elsewhere.

5.7 4.7 1892 44.0 -

e-2008 GT Line ★★★★★ 30.9.20
Cheaper versions impress; pricier ones won't worry class leaders.

9.5 8.9 1638 - -

3008 1.6 BlueHDI 120 GT Line
★★★★☆ 18.1.17
In challenging company, the 3008 promises more than it delivers.

12.0 12.1 1300 53.2 -

e-3008 73kWh Allure ★★★★★ 4.8.24
Electric family SUV is rich, handsome and refined but no technical tour de force.

8.5 7.1 2132 - 219

5008 Hybrid 136 GT ★★★★★ 12.2.25
Concept car style can't save the function-follows-form engineering.

9.9 9.4 1736 44.0 -

POLESTAR
2 BST Edition 270 ★★★★★ 12.4.23
A creditable attempt at electric car thrills, although not quite fully formed.

4.5 3.4 2161 - 188

3 Long Range Dual Motor Launch Edition ★★★★★ 12.2.25
Electric SUV is spacious, attractive and enticing to drive - with a few lapses.

4.6 3.8 2610 2.3 235

0-60mph
30-70mph
Kerb weight
Touring economy
Electric range

PORSCHE
718 Boxster ★★★★★ 8.6.16
Better than ever objectively, but at the expense of vital subjective appeal.

5.4 4.3 1395 35.9 -

718 Cayman S ★★★★★ 10.8.16
Still the greatest sports coupé out there, even if it doesn't sound like it.

4.8 3.9 1430 - -

718 Spyder ★★★★★ 1.4.20
Spyder's flat six rectifies most, if not quite all, of the 718's shortcomings.

4.3 3.5 1350 30.1 -

718 Cayman GT4 RS ★★★★★ 14.9.22
A feast of noise, revs, handling poise and thrills. Incredibly special.

3.9 3.0 1444 27.1 -

911 Carrera S ★★★★★ 29.5.19
Faster, richer and more competent than the 991, if less vivacious.

3.4 2.8 1525 39.4 -

911 GT3 PDK ★★★★★ 11.8.21
Less versatile than some past GT3s but still spectacularly good.

3.4 2.7 1430 29.2 -

911 Turbo S ★★★★★ 10.8.22
Has a questionable raison d'être but is engaging and awesomely capable.

2.5 2.0 1640 36.3 -

911 Carrera T ★★★★★ 30.8.23
Sharper 911 has a likeable simplicity but makes key compromises.

4.9 3.8 1456 39.1 -

911 GT3 RS ★★★★★ 22.11.23
Esoteric even by hardcore 911 standards but simply monumental.

3.2 2.5 1476 26.7 -

0-60mph
30-70mph
Kerb weight
Touring economy
Electric range

Panamera 4 E-Hybrid ★★★★★ 22.1.25
Understated plug-in hybrid is a Swiss Army knife super-saloon.

3.8 2.4 2370 30.1 29

Taycan Turbo S ★★★★★ 30.10.24
Porsche deftly keeps its superb EV on the boil.

2.6 1.9 2356 2.7 233

RENAULT
Clio Tce 100 Iconic ★★★★★ 27.11.19
Plusher, smoother, more mature. A car of substance as well as style.

11.6 10.9 1138 56.9 -

Mégane E-Tech Techno ★★★★★ 23.11.22
Likeable and eye-catching, but rivals have moved the EV game on.

6.9 5.4 1688 - 198

Captur Tce 130 S-Edition EDC ★★★★★ 18.3.20
Second-generation Captur should prove popular, but not with this powertrain.

9.4 9.2 1363 53.1 -

Arkana E-Tech Hybrid 145 S-Edition ★★★★★ 13.10.21
Showy styling clothes an eminently sensible but unspectacular car.

11.0 10.1 1365 58.3 -

Scenic E-Tech Iconic Long Range ★★★★★ 26.6.24
The Scenic finally conforms but does so with style and substance.

8.1 6.3 1916 - 313

Austral E-Tech Iconic Esprit Alpine ★★★★★ 19.7.23
Clever hybrid and pleasant cabin but let down by clumsy dynamics.

8.5 6.9 1696 43.5 -

ROLLS-ROYCE
Ghost ★★★★★ 13.1.21
Most technologically advanced Rolls-Royce is an exceptional limo.

4.7 3.8 2490 28.5 -

0-60mph
30-70mph
Kerb weight
Touring economy
Electric range

Ateca 1.5 Eco TSI FR Black Edition DSG ★★★★★ 25.10.23
Once-appealing Nissan Qashqai rival now shows some signs of neglect.

8.9 8.0 1396 44.4 -

SKODA
Fabia 1.0 TSI 95PS SE Comfort ★★★★★ 9.2.22
Comfy, spacious and good value, this supermini is Skoda at its best.

9.9 9.7 1117 58.7 -

Scala SE 1.5 TSI 150PS DSG ★★★★★ 31.7.19
Different from the bigger Octavia but perhaps not by enough.

7.9 7.3 1200 52.9 -

Octavia 2.0 TDI 150PS SEL First Edition Estate DSG ★★★★★ 2.9.20
Leads the charge to take Skoda upmarket and mostly succeeds.

8.4 8.7 1510 73.0 -

Octavia Estate vRS ★★★★★ 29.1.25
A fine estate made more engaging rather than a great hot hatch made a bit bigger.

5.9 4.8 - 37.6 -

Superb SEL 2.0 TDI 150PS Estate ★★★★★ 17.7.24
The large, functional estate car modernised in all the right ways.

8.4 8.2 1673 68.7 -

Karoq 2.0 TDI 150PS Scout ★★★★★ 30.1.19
Practical, comfortable Skoda is short on charm and dynamic polish.

8.9 9.6 1629 47.1 -

Enyaq iV 80 Lounge ★★★★★ 18.8.21
Practical, rangy, well priced. Hits a sweet spot in the EV market.

8.3 7.8 2098 - 262

SMART
#1 Premium ★★★★★ 8.11.23
Drivability frustrations mar an otherwise agreeable experience.

5.6 4.6 1861 - 229

#3 Premium ★★★★★ 15.5.24
Makings of an interesting alternative EV but let down by the finer details.

5.7 4.9 1832 - 205

SUBARU
Crosstrek 2.0i e-Boxer Touring ★★★★★ 28.2.24
Improved manners for junior off-roader are welcome, if not transformative.

10.4 10.4 1620 45.3 -

Outback 2.5i Lineartronic Touring ★★★★★ 27.9.23
A pretty good answer to a question that only a few people asked.

9.3 8.7 1690 42.8 -

Solterra AWD Touring ★★★★★ 15.3.23
A hint of Subaru-typical capability doesn't take this EV quite far enough.

6.7 6.2 2051 - 169

SUZUKI
Vitara 1.6 SZ5 ★★★★★ 29.4.15
The Vitara is solidly built in Suzuki's image - and that's fine with us.

9.5 9.5 1124 - -

SX4 S-Cross 1.6 DDiS SZ4 ★★★★★ 30.10.13
Quietly capable in most respects and remarkable for its parsimony.

10.0 10.1 1305 67.5 -

BEST COUPES



1 BMW 4 Series Coupé



2 Mercedes-Benz CLE Coupé



3 Porsche 718 Cayman

SCAN THE
CODE TO SEE
THE TOP 10



0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

Across 2.5 PHEV-E-Four CVT

★★★★★ 7.4.21
Excellent hybrid powertrain makes it one of the best PHEVs around.

6.4	5.8	1966	44.4	48
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TESLA**Model 3 Standard Range Plus**

★★★★★ 4.9.19
Wrinkles aside, it offers great electric performance and usability at this price.

5.8	4.7	1633	-	156
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Model 3 Long Range ★★★★★ 14.2.24

Packs a real punch. Both updated Model 3s are fine propositions.

4.4	3.4	1846	-	277
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Model Y Long Range AWD

★★★★★ 23.3.22
A far better electric car than a premium SUV.

4.7	3.6	1978	-	234
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Model S P90D ★★★★★ 20.4.16

Great EV, intriguing driver's car. Not quite the perfect luxury GT.

3.5	3.0	2220	-	214
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Model S Plaid ★★★★★ 2.8.23

Astonishing pace but not a fully rounded performance saloon.

2.4	1.7	2220	-	301
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Model X 90D ★★★★★ 15.2.17

High-rise EV strains under SUV brief but still feels like a history maker.

5.2	4.2	2508	-	147
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TOYOTA**Aygo X Limited Edition** ★★★★★ 11.5.22

A mostly very grown-up small car but also an expensive one.

15.6	16.5	974	58.7	-
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Yaris 1.5 Hybrid Design ★★★★★ 23.9.20

Grows not only in stature but also in ability and subjective appeal.

9.2	8.8	1140	65.0	-
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GR Yaris Circuit Pack ★★★★★ 3.3.21

Toyota, on a roll with driver's cars, provides yet another winner.

5.2	5.0	1283	39.2	-
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Corolla 2.0 Hybrid Design Touring Sports ★★★★★ 5.6.19

A big step up for Toyota in a vital sector and a better hybrid to boot.

8.5	7.7	1537	52.6	-
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b24X AWD Vision ★★★★★ 18.1.23

A decent effort all round but not exceptional in any way.

6.4	5.9	2023	-	208
-----	-----	------	---	-----

Mirai Design Premium ★★★★★ 16.6.21

Impressive hydrogen fuel cell car has made strides but remains hamstrung overall.

8.7	8.3	1937	-	-
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GR Supra Pro ★★★★★ 14.8.19

Fast, usable and has plenty going for it but leaves us wanting more.

4.4	3.6	1495	39.0	-
-----	-----	------	------	---

Hilux 2.8 D-4D GR Sport ★★★★★ 1.3.23

Gazoo-branded Ford Ranger Raptor rival is formidable but lacks fun factor.

10.0	9.5	2241	32.5	-
------	-----	------	------	---

VAUXHALL**Corsa 1.2 Turbo 100PS Ultimate Nav Auto** ★★★★★ 22.1.20

Supermini is improved in many ways but lacks the appeal to match its price.

11.2	11.5	1171	51.8	-
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0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

Astra 1.2 Turbo 130PS GS Line

★★★★★ 5.10.22
Family hatchback's gentle push upmarket is only a qualified success.

9.9	9.2	1304	55.3	-
-----	-----	------	------	---

Crossland X 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite

★★★★★ 7.6.17
Typically practical and well priced, but Vauxhall can do better.

9.8	10.3	1278	54.2	-
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Mokka 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite Nav Premium Auto ★★★★★ 12.5.21

The driving experience sells a brave design effort just a little short.

9.3	9.1	1238	48.6	-
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Grandland X Hybrid4 Ultimate Nav

★★★★★ 22.4.20
Inspires big expectations and delivers few, but it's an interesting fleet option.

-	-	1800	-	-
---	---	------	---	---

Combo Life 1.5 Turbo D 100PS Energy

★★★★★ 27.12.18
Usable, spacious and practical, if not very pretty to look at.

14.7	16.2	1552	60.1	-
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VOLKSWAGEN**Polo 1.0 TSI 95PS SE** ★★★★★ 31.1.18

Brings 'big car' space, class, kit and finish to this class like never before.

10.7	11.2	1145	57.1	-
------	------	------	------	---

Polo 2.0 TSI GTI+ ★★★★★ 1.8.18

A usable, quick and vastly competent effort but not the most thrilling.

6.7	5.9	1342	46.8	-
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Golf 1.5 eTSI 150PS Style DSG

★★★★★ 22.7.20
Additional strengths and familiar ones carry it back to the class lead.

8.3	7.8	1330	60.0	-
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Golf 1.5 TSI eHybrid Style

★★★★★ 23.10.24
New plug-in Golf takes the PHEV hatchback's status to greater heights.

7.2	6.1	1619	46.5	-
-----	-----	------	------	---

Golf GTI ★★★★★ 25.9.24

'Mk8.5' version of hot hatchback is slick and effective but not a big enough step forward.

5.3	4.4	-	47.2	-
-----	-----	---	------	---

Golf R ★★★★★ 14.4.21

Most entertaining distillation of the Golf R formula yet – for a price.

4.4	3.7	1520	43.9	-
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ID 3 Pro Performance Life ★★★★★ 31.3.21

Bland but with the substance to further the zero-emissions push.

7.0	6.5	1757	-	145
-----	-----	------	---	-----

Arteon 2.0 BitDI 240PS 4Motion R-Line

★★★★★ 27.9.17
Considered approach produces an executive flagship short on sparkle.

6.5	6.2	1866	55.6	-
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Arteon eHybrid Elegance Shooting Brake ★★★★★ 9.6.21

Striking PHEV appears radical but upholds Volkswagen's traditions at heart.

7.1	6.0	1783	52.5	-
-----	-----	------	------	---

ID 7 Pro Match ★★★★★ 13.3.24

Volkswagen finds some electric form in an unexpected format.

6.1	5.1	2162	-	239
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0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

T-Roc 2.0 TSI 190PS 4Motion SEL DSG

★★★★★ 24.1.18
Shows performance verve, dynamic completeness and stylish swagger.

6.7	6.5	1534	37.5	-
-----	-----	------	------	---

T-Roc 1.5 TSI Evo R-Line Cabriolet DSG

★★★★★ 10.6.20
It brings little worth having to the compact cabriolet niche.

-	-	1540	-	-
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Tiguan 1.5 eTSI 150PS R-Line

★★★★★ 22.5.24
Functional and mature, but this isn't the engine or trim we would go for.

9.4	9.2	1606	44.9	-
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ID 4 GTX Max ★★★★★ 27.10.21

GTX adds flavour to ID 4 but doesn't reimagine 'GTI' for the EV age.

6.2	5.6	2220	-	200
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Touareg 3.0 TDI 4Motion R-Line Tech

★★★★★ 8.8.18
An inoffensive if forgettable bid at a luxury market breakthrough.

7.2	6.6	2292	41.6	-
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Touareg 3.0 TSI eHybrid 4Motion Elegance ★★★★★ 5.6.24

★★★★★ 5.6.24
It's versatile and likeably unpretentious but won't be a default company car choice.

6.2	5.7	2446	34.1	26
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Toucan 2.0 TDI 150PS SE Family DSG

★★★★★ 3.2.16
A spacious, refined and classy all-rounder – albeit a slightly bland one.

9.9	9.7	1666	-	-
-----	-----	------	---	---

Multivan 1.4 eHybrid Style

★★★★★ 8.3.23
Latest Volkswagen 'bus' combines the best bits of both car and van.

8.4	7.1	2243	37.9	14
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ID Buzz 77kWh Style Pro ★★★★★ 8.2.23

It costs plenty but offers versatility and luxury accomplishments.

9.5	9.1	2498	-	185
-----	-----	------	---	-----

Grand California 600 ★★★★★ 2.1.20

Grandest California is classy but not half as clever as its smaller namesake.

15.8	16.7	3095	28.5	-
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Transporter Sportline Black Edition Kombi SWB ★★★★★ 30.3.22

Not compromised but hardly enhanced by its sporting agenda.

9.1	9.0	2108	39.1	-
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Passat eHybrid 204PS Elegance

★★★★★ 13.11.24
Rounded and with good PHEV credentials, but less compelling than its sister car.

7.2	6.4	1836	44.5	73
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VOLVO**EX30 Single Motor Extended Range Plus** ★★★★★ 1.5.24

Not enough key strengths – and not enough Volvo pragmatism.

5.7	5.1	1779	-	179
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C40 Recharge Twin Ultimate

★★★★★ 13.4.22
A transitional model for Volvo that doesn't go quite far enough.

4.4	3.6	2172	-	194
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XC40 D4 AWD First Edition

★★★★★ 7.2.18
Wieldy, classy and simple. As good as its bigger brothers, if not better.

8.5	8.5	1735	43.8	-
-----	-----	------	------	---

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

XC60 D4 AWD R-Design

★★★★★ 5.7.17
The right product at the right time but lacking the right dynamic finish.

8.9	8.9	1836	48.9	-
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XC90 D5 AWD Momentum

★★★★★ 17.6.15
A very impressive all-rounder with its own distinctive appeal.

8.3	8.3	2076	-	-
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V60 D4 Momentum Pro Auto

★★★★★ 27.6.18
Fine-looking, capable and practical estate with only a few demerits.

8.9	8.3	1669	43.1	-
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V60 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design

★★★★★ 21.9.22
Strong hybrid system gives ageing Volvo a lot of fresh appeal.

4.9	4.3	2036	38.0	51
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V90 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design

★★★★★ 11.11.20
Hardly revolutionary but exceptionally appealing nonetheless.

5.6	4.9	2109	41.9	-
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XPENG**G6 RWD Standard Range** ★★★★★ 26.2.25

Chinese electric SUV lacks inspiration but has plenty of rational appeal.

6.8	6.2	2067	3.3	208
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WHAT'S COMING WHEN**Renault 4 July**

Small electric crossover is essentially a more practical 5.

**MG Cyberster 2+2 August**

MG marks 60th anniversary of the B GT by reviving it as an EV.

**AC Ace Electric May**

Reborn '60s roadster packs 300bhp into a 1134kg shell.

SCAN THE CODE FOR THE FULL LIST



Why I love...

THE BOGGO VW GOLF



BY JAMES ATTWOOD

In traditionally distracting fashion, a recent meandering office chat turned to the thorny subject of the best-ever Volkswagen Golf. A shortlist was duly assembled and it was understandably filled with performance versions spanning the generations: GTIs, Rs, R32s, 16vs, Clubsports et al. Heck, I think someone pushed for the W12-650.

It was a fine list and sparked plenty of debate, although clearly the correct answer is the Mk7.5 GTI. Thanks, no further questions.

But in celebrating the fastest, funnest Golf models to drive, I reckon something is lost. Because regardless of the generation, when it comes to value for money, all-round usability and general agreeability, in my mind the best Golf, the Golfiest Golf, is usually the bog-standard one.

An example might help. A few years back, I ran a pair of Golf Mk8s back to back on our long-term test fleet: an entry-level Life TSI followed by a GTI. Undoubtedly, the GTI looked sharper outside, was plusher inside (you've got to love a bit of tartan) and, on the right road, was sharper and more entertaining. So, overall, which did I enjoy more? Of course it was the entry-level one.

For everyday driving, it was just easier to live with and more relaxing to drive and did pretty much everything you could reasonably want from it, without any real compromise. The ride was soft enough to tackle any bumps, it was still plenty comfy inside, there was all the kit you needed, it was pleasantly fun to drive and cheaper to buy and run and I was less worried about dinging the alloys. And it did all that, like



Attwood ran an entry-level Golf and a GTI back to back. Guess his favourite



VW's Golf has been getting the basics spot on for five decades

"It did everything I wanted of it with absolutely no fuss"

its boggo predecessors did over seven previous generations, with absolutely no fuss.

In similar fashion, you do make judgements about other motorists based on what car they drive. But I reckon it's impossible to think ill of someone for driving a standard Golf. It's the absolute sweet spot in the car market: you don't look at a Golf driver and think they've paid for

badge prestige, but nor do you think they don't know or care about cars. You don't question why they've bought a big SUV that doesn't fit down their street. Instead, you think: "There's a person who's bought all the car they need and nothing they don't."

Truly, the bog-standard, entry-level Golf is the baby bear's porridge of the car world: not too hot, not too cold, just about right. And that's not just in terms of the Volkswagen line-up but the whole car industry.

For the past 50 years, if you've wanted a car that will do everything well and rarely let you down, the default choice has been a Golf – and not just any Golf but the entry-level one.

What we did this week



NICE DAY FOR IT

The weather behaved while we shot details for this week's Granturismo road test, but when I was turfed out of the EV for some cornering snaps, I might as well have been chucked into a river. Walls of water cascaded from the sky, accompanied by incessant thunderclaps. The kicker? We

then drove miles away for a second shoot, and ended up in the same storm again. Guess what 'Folgore' means in Italian? **JACK HARRISON**



HAVING MEON

I hope my first time driving the Mika Meon will not be my last. I've never driven something without doors or any kind of roof before and was slightly intimidated to break my duck in 3deg C conditions, but the icy wind chill combined with its uncorrupted handling made it pretty unforgettable – and, best of all, I didn't lose my hat! **JONATHAN BRYCE**



CHECK-OUT TIME

Photographer Jack Harrison and I found a great bit of road a couple of hours from Lisbon while driving the new Ferrari 12Cilindri Spider – plus an abandoned little hotel (ripe for a rebuild) from where one could host some excellent car meets. I'm checking our employer's expenses policy. **MATT PRIOR**



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